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English  
Classical Readers

SIR ROBERT PEELE

G. BARNETT SMITH







50  
involved in the Catholic question,  
currency, - reforming & humanizing the  
criminal law, police force.

Later he gave - to the abolition of the  
Corporation Acts. Catholic emancipation  
broke up the party in 1836. The Reform  
Bill brought them together again, & now  
as then they were divided. The Bill  
became law in 1832 after the general election  
of 1832 left L with only 50 followers in  
Commons, he set out to weld them  
into a compact body. He had learned to  
adapt his ideas & policies to the mood  
of the age.

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*ENGLISH POLITICAL LEADERS*

# SIR ROBERT PEEL

BY

GEORGE BARNETT SMITH

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF THE RIGHT HON. W. E. GLADSTONE, M.P.;"  
"POETS AND NOVELISTS," ETC.

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## CHAPTER I.

### BIRTH AND EDUCATION.

IT is only by a future generation that a great statesman can be adequately and justly judged. This is especially the case as regards a Minister like Sir Robert Peel, who was obliged at several critical periods to abandon his cherished political convictions, and to adopt a policy subversive of the fundamental ideas of his party. Charged by his former friends with inconsistency and dissimulation, this distinguished political leader falls back upon posterity for his vindication. In tracing the history of his singularly interesting and remarkable career, we shall endeavour to indicate, through the medium of his acts and speeches, assisted by his posthumous Memoirs, those grounds of justification by which alone his radical changes of policy can be reconciled and elucidated. There is much in the character and life of Peel to command the admiration and sympathy of men of all shades of political opinion; and, impressed by that feeling, it will be our object to divest this biographical record of party passion. We instinctively speak of this eminent statesman as a great party leader, and yet the elements of his greatness were not such as we usually associate with that epithet. Genius was lacking in him, and his greatness was built up of almost commonplace materials. This fact only leads to a deeper consideration of his personal

qualities, and the means by which he rose to the exalted position of Prime Minister. Peel had not those fascinating endowments which appeal to the dramatic sense in man; the highest eloquence was denied him; there was nothing romantic, either in the cast of his mind or the circumstances by which he was surrounded, that could stimulate the imagination. If we depict him, it must not be with the brilliant colours of a Titian, but rather with the homely traits of a Teniers. A wise adaptability was one of the root causes of his success. He was a political philosopher of the most practical type. He united in himself many of the best characteristics of his countrymen, and was the product of several generations of typical Englishmen. He was not a statesman fitted to control the destinies of a nation in moments of supreme peril, and could never have grappled, for example, with the power and resources of a Napoleon. He rose to distinction at a period when England had ceased to be distracted by foreign wars—when she had arrived at a time of transition, and the people clamoured loudly for domestic reforms. Such a period needs rather the sagacious than the originative statesman, and in every sense Peel was admirably fitted for this new departure in public affairs.

The Peel family, which originally had a settlement in Yorkshire, migrated about the year 1600 to Lancashire, where one William Peele established himself near to Blackburn. This ancestor of the future statesman belonged to one of those families of English yeomanry, the members of which have been described as happy in a golden mean, too high for the office of Constable, and too low for that of Sheriff. The Peels have generally been described as of Saxon race, but Sir Lawrence Peel says there is no evidence by which they can be traced to

any one in particular of the many races, the mingled blood of which has produced the English yeoman. The father of the first Sir Robert Peel was born at Peel Fold, a small estate still belonging to the family, and situate near the town of Blackburn. In 1744 he married a Miss Haworth, of Lower Darwen. The Haworths were of ancient origin, and of superior social standing to the Peels. Robert Peel, the grandfather, first supported himself partly by farming, and partly by hand-loom weaving. But in conjunction with his brother-in-law, Mr. Haworth, and a Mr. Yates, he began the business of calico-printing. The firm introduced considerable improvements in the machinery for spinning cotton, and set up a warehouse in Manchester for the sale of their own cloth. On account of his choice of a parsley leaf for a design in his calicoes, Robert Peel was nicknamed "Parsley Peel."

The first Sir Robert Peel was the manufacturer's third son. Desiring a wider field for the display of his energies than his father's establishment provided, he left home and became a junior partner in a manufactory at Bury, carried on by his relative, Mr. Haworth, and Mr. Yates, whose daughter he subsequently married. The business greatly prospered, chiefly owing to the talents and energy of the junior partner, and by the time he was forty Robert Peel possessed a considerable fortune. In character, he is represented as ambitious and loving money, but principally as an instrument of power. He was of a genial, generous nature, most bountiful in his gifts, and thoroughly cosmopolitan withal, allowing no differences of politics or religion to interfere with his charity. He was an enemy of the lazy and the improvident only, and his watchword was industry. He was, moreover, a man of strong moral and religious convictions. His distin-

guished son was his third child, the first two being girls ; and when the tidings reached him that he was the father of a son, he fell upon his knees and thanked God, vowing that he "would give his child to his country," an end which he ever afterwards kept in view. The ambition of the first Sir Robert led him into the sphere of politics. He published a pamphlet on the National Debt (for financial questions he had a considerable aptitude), and became acquainted with Mr. Pitt, who was the object of his warmest admiration. "No Minister," he said on one occasion in the House of Commons, "ever understood so well the commercial interests of the country. He knew that the true sources of its greatness lay in its productive industry." Mr. Peel having acquired a large property at Tamworth, was returned by that borough to the House of Commons in the year 1790. During the critical and momentous period which followed he was most patriotic and loyal, and in 1797 his firm contributed no less than £10,000 to the voluntary subscriptions raised for the prosecution of the war on the Continent. Being now a somewhat important public personage, in the year 1800 Mr. Peel was created a baronet, a dignity which he continued to enjoy for thirty years. It was observed of him by his successor that he might be truly regarded as the founder of the family ; "and he so accurately appreciated the importance of commercial wealth, in a national point of view, that he was often heard to say that the gains to individuals were small compared with the national gains arising from trade."

The repealer of the Corn Laws was born on the 5th of February, 1788. The place of his birth was a small cottage in the neighbourhood of Chamber Hall, his father's residence near Bury, in Lancashire, the house

itself being at the time under repair. By a curious coincidence, the year of his birth was the same as that of his schoolfellow, Lord Byron; and it is further worth noting that in the year 1809 both entered the Legislature together, Peel in the Lower, Byron in the Upper House. It may also be mentioned that in the same year in which Peel entered the House of Commons there was born his most famous pupil, and the third of our great English financiers, William Ewart Gladstone. Young Peel was at first educated under the eye of his father, who instilled into him the principles of Pitt, and held up for his imitation the character and career of the celebrated Minister. Peel was a quick and clever boy, but he is described by his relative as no prodigy, although Lord Dalling and Bulwer refers to anecdotes told in his family of early manifestations of more than ordinary ability. Precocity is no sign of future greatness, and a healthy, all-round development is perhaps the best which a father could desire for his child. The powers of the mind will then have full opportunity of displaying themselves unchecked by physical drawbacks.

In due course the boy was sent to Harrow, and Byron has left this pleasant record of his schoolfellow: "Peel, the orator and statesman ('that was, or is, or is to be'), was my form-fellow, and we were both at the top of our remove. We were on good terms, but his brother was my intimate friend. There were always great hopes of Peel amongst us all, masters and scholars; and he has not disappointed them. As a scholar he was greatly my superior; as a declaimer and actor I was reckoned at least his equal. As a schoolboy out of school, I was always in scrapes, and he never; in school he always knew his lesson, and I



rarely ; but when I knew it, I knew it nearly as well. In general information, history, &c., I think I was his superior, as well as of most boys of my standing." It is stated that Robert Peel and his brother William Yates Peel (the friend of Byron) were reading with a certain clergyman, of whom their father one day asked whether William would be a William Pitt, when his reply was, "I hope so ; but Robert will be Robert Peel." At Oxford, whither he was sent as a gentleman commoner of Christ Church, Peel proved not only that he had capacity for work, but talents of a very considerable order ; and yet he seems to have taken special pains to avoid parade of his scholarship. He was a good boater and cricketer, and he was rather anxious to be regarded as a well-dressed man. Nevertheless, he attained special distinction at the university. Entering there when he had barely completed his sixteenth year, after four years of study he took the B.A. degree in Michaelmas term, 1808, under unprecedented circumstances. The present system of Oxford examinations had only just then been inaugurated, and Peel was the first man who ever took the honours of a double first-class—that is, first in classics and first in mathematics. Here was something at least to gratify the heart of the proud Sir Robert.

In 1809, having then just attained his majority, Peel entered Parliament as member for Cashel, one of that class of boroughs without which many distinguished politicians of past generations would have been unable to obtain a seat in the House of Commons. There was no question as to the political complexion of the young member. M. Guizot says, "*Il naquit Tory* ;" yet although by birth, training, and associations he was a Tory, there were even in his youthful days some

questions which he could regard from a very Liberal standpoint. But his natural party was the Tory party, and into that party he consequently threw himself heart and soul. There seems to have been no disguise as to the high destiny which Sir Robert Peel coveted for his son. It was assumed in the House from the outset that he would shortly attain to office, and visions of the Premiership were attributed to the young member. In a political squib purporting to be the last will and testament of an expiring patriot, there was an amusing proviso to this effect: "I give and bequeath my patience to Mr. Robert Peel, and he will want it all before he becomes Prime Minister of England; but in the event of such a contingency, my patience is to revert to the people of England, who will stand sadly in need of it." At the time of Peel's return to Parliament the Duke of Portland was Premier, the chief members of his Cabinet being Perceval, leader of the House of Commons, Castlereagh, Secretary at War, and Canning, Foreign Minister. As a result of the disastrous expedition to Walcheren, serious differences arose in the Ministry, and before Parliament assembled in 1810 it had been reconstructed. Canning was very desirous of shelving Castlereagh, and the latter having accused his colleague of treachery, a duel ensued, in which Canning was wounded. The Duke of Portland resigned, and the two hostile secretaries followed his example. Mr. Spencer Perceval became Prime Minister, and it was in his Ministry that Lord Palmerston entered upon official life.

Parliament met on the 23rd of January, 1810. Sir Lawrence Peel states that during his first year in Parliament Mr. Peel was wisely silent; and he also speaks of

his close and regular attendance, with the desire to study other men, a line of conduct very different from that of some young Parliamentarians. This is a somewhat inexplicable though an unquestionable oversight. Peel was not returned for Cashel until after the rising of Parliament in 1809, the member during that session—which Sir L. Peel evidently regards as Peel's first—being, as we have discovered, Mr. Quintin Dick. The theory of his reticence consequently falls to the ground. It is, moreover, highly improbable, knowing what we do of Peel's energetic character, and his desire to distinguish himself, that he could have kept silence during a whole session. So far from this being the case, we find that in 1810, which was really his first session in the House of Commons, he spoke on three occasions. That something was expected from him is proved by the fact that he was chosen to second the address. This was his maiden speech, and it was delivered before a brilliant assembly, amongst whom was the Princess of Wales. Her Royal Highness remained in the House while the division on the address was taken, but the Speaker would not allow the numbers to be announced by the tellers until she had withdrawn.

Mr. Peel's speech was fluent, but not otherwise noticeable, except for the patriotic nature of its sentiments. It occupies, however, nearly five columns in *Hansard*. After referring to the defence made against the power of France by Austria and Spain, and lamenting the miseries especially of the latter country, he referred to the services of Lord Wellington, who, in a bloody and unequal contest, had once more established the bravery of the British soldier. "England," the speaker continued, "desired neither peace nor war,



but she would suffer no indignity, and make no unbecoming concessions. With every engine of power and perfidy against us, the situation of this country had proved to Bonaparte that it was invulnerable in the very point to which all his efforts were directed. The accounts of the exports of British manufactures would be found to exceed by several millions those of any former period. With regard to our internal condition, while France had been stripped of the flower of her youth, England had continued flourishing, and the only alteration had been the substitution of machinery for manual labour." In conclusion, he observed that "the aggression, usurpation, and tyranny of Bonaparte was the only subject upon which all parties united. But to resist him in his encroachments effectually, unanimity was absolutely necessary, and the nature of the contest in which we were engaged required that every heart and hand should be joined to give strength to the common cause. He hoped we should still be able, as we had hitherto been, to ride in safety through the storm that had destroyed the rest of Europe, and that we should still stretch forth a hand to succour those who were yet struggling for life against the angry waves. To be successful in that generous course he felt that they must be unanimous; he felt that there could be but one sentiment among the men to whom he addressed himself, and that that sentiment must do honour to themselves and to their country." An amendment to the address was proposed by Lord Gower, but it was lost by a majority of ninety-six votes.

Mr. Peel spoke in the debate which arose upon the petition of the Livery of London as to the committal of Sir F. Burdett, &c., and praying for an immediate and radical reform in the Commons' House of Parliament.

He maintained that if they were to lay that paper on the table, they might prepare to expect insult—it knocked at the door in the humble character of a petition, but when it got in it would show its real nature. “He thought it was not too much to require that petitions should at least have the negative merit of decency.” The petition in question, which was drawn up in a somewhat independent tone, but which was still more obnoxious to a majority of the House on account of its substance, was rejected by a majority of ninety-two. The third occasion upon which Mr. Peel rose during this session was in connection with the Expedition to the Scheldt. This unfortunate enterprise, known as the Walcheren Expedition, consisted of thirty-five British ships of the line and two hundred smaller vessels, principally transports, and forty thousand land forces, the latter under the command of the Earl of Chatham, and the fleet under Sir Richard Strachan. The destination of the expedition was kept secret for some time; but before the 28th of July, 1809, when it set sail, the French journals had announced that Walcheren was the point of attack. In August, Flushing was invested; a dreadful bombardment ensued, and the place was taken on the 15th; but it seemed that no suggestion on the part of the naval commander, nor urging on the part of the officers, could induce the Earl to take vigorous action until the period of probable success was gone, and necessity obliged him to return with as many of the troops as disease and an unhealthy climate had spared. This strange fiasco gave rise to the well-known epigram—

“The Earl of Chatham, with his sword drawn,  
Stood waiting for Sir Richard Strachan;  
Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,  
Stood waiting for the Earl of Chatham.”

Flushing was evacuated on the 23rd of December. On the 26th of the following March, Lord Porchester moved in the House of Commons a series of resolutions, founded upon evidence taken at the bar, condemnatory of the conduct of the Government in regard to the expedition. The debate was very protracted, and Mr. Canning and other prominent members delivered eloquent speeches. Mr. Peel rallied to the support of the Government, basing his defence of their policy on the fact that they had determined upon the armament with the fairest prospect of success. "What," he asked, "would have been the decision of the country, if it had seen its Government sunk in a cold and torpid inactivity at that period when the storm was gathering in Germany, when Austria was determined to make one bold effort to resist the unprincipled exactions of the enemy of her independence? In such a state of things was Great Britain to continue regardless because she was not a sufferer—to be indifferent because she was safe? Having, then, decided to co-operate with Austria, what did true policy point at as the theatre for our exertions? France, we knew, wished to regenerate her naval greatness, and nature, combined with art, had fitted out the Scheldt as the most formidable position for extending her maritime power. Whether they looked to security from invasion, or to the protection of our commerce, Ministers must have felt the necessity of making an attempt upon those sources of our annoyance." He further held that if a tame and spiritless calculation of the risk became the criterion of national enterprise, then the country should at once obliterate from the proud pages of its history the memory and the mention of all its heroic deeds. Lord Porchester's resolutions were rejected; but in a House

composed of upwards of five hundred members, the Government only obtained a majority of forty-eight. As a result of the Parliamentary inquiry, nevertheless, Lord Chatham resigned his post of Master-General of the Ordnance to avert further disgrace.

Peel was now fairly launched upon his political career ; but unfortunately for him he began public life just at the moment when the Ministry he supported had become discredited with the country. Moreover, although the Premier was satisfied with the services he had rendered him during this important session, the speeches of the member for Cashel had certainly not exceeded, if indeed they had fulfilled, the expectations indulged in by the House generally. There were also amongst his fellow-members men of powerful and shining abilities. The great masters of politics and eloquence, Pitt, Fox, and Burke, were no longer alive ; but the public—still thrilling with the recollection of their mighty conflicts—could yet listen to and be moved by living examples of fine oratorical power ; for Grattan, Sheridan, Tierney, Romilly, Windham, and, above all, Canning, still held brilliant possession of the stage. Brougham had just entered the House. More judicious than energetic, and more lucid than impetuous, Robert Peel did not, at the first onset, win his due renown and rank in the opinion of the mass of spectators.<sup>1</sup> The oratorical traditions of the House were against Peel's style of speech. With more fire and energy, more in fact of the genius of the true orator, they would have readily condoned faults of rashness. But Peel was correct and precise rather than moving, smooth and self-possessed instead of being impassioned, fluent rather than eloquent.

<sup>1</sup> M. Guizot's *Memoirs of Sir Robert Peel*.

In person Peel is represented at this time as tall and well formed. His figure was slender rather than robust, and had no suggestion of that corpulency which marked it in later years. He was of active habits, and given to athletic sports ; a good walker, and also fond of shooting. His features were good ; he had a sweet smile, a well-formed head, high and ample forehead, not too grand a portico, and a countenance which, when animated, was not wanting in expression or fire. In fine, he was of prepossessing and comely presence.

It is not surprising, however, that the Prime Minister, Mr. Perceval, soon discovered his worth. Distinctly above mediocrity in intellectual and speaking power, Mr. Peel became speedily still more conspicuous for his business abilities. The Government of the day was not so strong that it could afford to despise any new men of talent upon its own side. The Premier held his exalted position by natural succession, not by reason of personal merit. On the collapse of the Duke of Portland's Administration and the retirement of Canning, there was no choice as to who should be First Minister. Mr. Perceval came in, gathering round him the scattered fragments of the late Government. But an abler man than the Premier had fixed his eye upon Mr. Peel, and the latter's first connection with official life was as private secretary to Lord Liverpool. During his relations with Lord Liverpool, Peel wrote a letter in connection with some public occurrence of the time, which gave special satisfaction to the King, who, in praising the writer of it, spoke also of his father as "a very honest man," this being regarded as high praise indeed from the aged monarch. Shortly afterwards Peel was appointed Under-Secretary for the Colonies.



The period of forty years stretching from 1810 to 1850—that is, from the time when Peel first took his seat in the House of Commons down to the year of his untimely death—was one of complete revolution in the domestic legislation of this country. During that memorable period the penal laws against the Roman Catholics were expunged from the statute-book; Dissenters were relieved from their disabilities; parliamentary reform opened the doors of the Constitution to large masses of our countrymen; commerce was relieved, and the homes of the people were gladdened by the abolition of the obnoxious corn laws; and the old Toryism of our forefathers passed away for ever, to give place to the modified Conservatism of a later age. “An entirely new spirit,” as a writer in the *Westminster Review* observed, “has been infused into our policy—the spirit of freedom and progress. If Sir Robert Peel’s first chief, Mr. Perceval, could return to life, he would find himself in a world in which he could recognise nothing, and in which he would be shocked at everything; and it is hard to say whether England or her quondam premier would be most scandalised at each other’s mutually strange and ghastly apparition.” Many of the wise, mighty, and beneficial changes above indicated we owe to the statesman whose initiation into official life we have just traced. In the sphere of politics it is especially true that nothing is so sure as the unexpected; and the closing decade of Peel’s career, as well as his earlier surrender in favour of Catholic Emancipation, might well fill with amazement those friends who had originally looked upon him as the bulwark of a relentless and an aggressive Toryism.

## CHAPTER II.

### SECRETARY FOR IRELAND.—CURRENCY REFORM.

ON the 11th of May, 1812, Mr. Perceval was assassinated by one Bellingham in the lobby of the House of Commons. This startling event, amongst other changes, led to Peel's advancement in official life. He was appointed by Lord Liverpool (who succeeded to the Premiership) to the important and onerous office of Chief Secretary for Ireland. This post has been one of the most difficult in every administration during the past century; and in Peel's time in particular it demanded a man of great circumspection, ability, and firmness to fill it with due acceptability. It says not a little, therefore, for the new Prime Minister's courage and prescience that he should have appointed to this high office a young man still in his twenty-fourth year. Yet the appointment did not go unquestioned. O'Connell, who was destined to have many a passage of arms with the new Secretary, bitterly remarked that there had been sent out to govern Ireland "a raw youth, squeezed out of the workings of I know not what factory in England, who began his parliamentary career by vindicating the gratuitous destruction of our brave soldiers in the murderous expedition to Walcheren, and was sent over here before

he got rid of the foppery of perfumed handkerchiefs and thin shoes, upon the ground, I suppose, that he had given a specimen of his talents for vindication that might be useful to the present and future administration of Ireland; in short, he was a lad ready to vindicate anything—everything!” This attack, which was quite unjustifiable—seeing that Peel had as yet afforded no grounds for such animadversion—was the first outburst of wrath on O’Connell’s part against one who, while yet a youth, was to prove that he was a capable administrator.

Although on the construction of the Liverpool Cabinet it was understood that the Catholic question was to be an open one, the Government of Ireland was still entrusted to a strong anti-Catholic, the Duke of Richmond. The Administration also leaned decidedly to the same views, and in these they were supported by the Prince Regent, who had abandoned his former opinions on this question. The Catholic claims were also opposed by the great bulk of the clergy and people of England. Peel himself, had circumstances been favourable, would probably not have been disinclined to discuss the Catholic claims; but he was driven to assume a position of strict hostility in consequence of the attitude of O’Connell and his friends, who rejected with scorn the moderate counsels of those Irish and English Catholics who were in favour of giving certain guarantees for maintaining the authority of the King and the State over the Catholic priesthood. The crisis, which it must be admitted was a very peculiar one, brought upon the Chief Secretary the nickname of “Orange Peel.” It was at this juncture that O’Connell first raised the cry of “Repeal of the Union” in connection with the Catholic claims; a cry which—as



Dr. Cooke Taylor has observed in his work upon the "Life and Times of Sir Robert Peel,"—"was promptly disclaimed by the Catholic nobility and gentry."

In consequence of the deplorable condition of the South of Ireland, in the session of 1814 Mr. Peel introduced two measures for the better execution of the laws and the preservation of peace—measures which Grattan admitted to be conceived in a mild and judicious spirit. On moving a slight addition to these measures subsequently, the Secretary congratulated the country on the improved tranquillity of Ireland, but referred with indignation to the attacks which had been made on his coercive measures by evil and designing men. It was unfortunate for Peel, who was not a convivial man, that he could take little part in the social life of Dublin, although his absence from scenes such as those for which the Duke of Richmond became notorious is to be warmly commended. For friendships in the Irish capital he was driven to such ultra-Protestants as Lord Newbury, Jebb, and others; and these social relations had the effect of still further alienating and exasperating the Catholics.

About this time the famous episode in connection with O'Connell occurred. Mr. Peel having read in the House of Commons extracts from O'Connell's speeches which placed the great agitator in a very unfavourable light, the latter retorted as follows in a speech delivered at a Catholic meeting: "All I shall say of him (Mr. Peel), by way of parenthesis, is, that I am told he has, in my absence, and in a place where he was privileged from any account, grossly traduced me. I said at the last meeting, in presence of the note-takers of the police, who are paid by him, that he was too prudent to attack

me in my presence. I see the same police informers here now, and I authorise them carefully to report these my words, that Mr. Peel would not dare, in my presence, nor in any place where he was liable to personal account, to use a single expression derogatory to my interest or my honour." A duel nearly ensued, but the final conclusion, instead of being sanguinary, was somewhat ludicrous. The prevailing code of honour compelled Peel to send his opponent a challenge. Seconds were named, but these gentlemen—being unable to decide as to who should be the challenger—appealed to the press. The accounts given of the affair were so contradictory that the seconds themselves picked a quarrel on their own account, which they proposed to adjust at Calais. Meanwhile O'Connell denounced the affair as a paltry trick, whereupon Peel sent him another challenge. The authorities having got wind of the affair, O'Connell was arrested, brought before the Chief Justice, and bound over to keep the peace. The parties next arranged to meet at Ostend; but O'Connell was again arrested, and this time bound over not to leave the kingdom. The seconds first appointed met at Calais; one of them shot in the air and the other did not shoot at all; and with this the affair was allowed to have ended satisfactorily. Peel, however, whose blood does not seem to have cooled, desired a separate duel with O'Connell's second; but this was not permitted. The epistolary missives in connection with this affair, which were somewhat voluminous, were afterwards published with the lively motto, "For the instruction of those who wish to know how to send or receive a challenge, without any intention of fighting."

Ireland continued to be disturbed through the whole of the years 1815 and 1816, and when an inquiry into

the condition of the country was moved for in the latter year, Peel drew, as Burke said on another occasion, an indictment against a whole nation. Nothing was more difficult, he said, than to give the House a description of the precise nature of the disturbances which agitated Ireland. They had no precise or definite cause; "they seemed to be the effect of a general confederacy in crime—a comprehensive conspiracy in guilt—a systematic opposition to all laws and municipal institutions. The records of the courts of justice would show such a settled and uniform system of guilt, such monstrous and horrible perjuries, as could not, he believed, be found in the annals of any country on the face of the globe, whether civilised or uncivilised." Before concluding, the Secretary proposed an enlargement of the means of national education, which drew from Mr. Plunket a fine and eloquent retort upon the inadequacy of such remedial means. He advised Ministers to retrace as exactly as possible the steps they had taken in the government of Ireland; "instead of establishing themselves on the narrow, odious principle of Protestant seclusion, which kept alive the spirit of dissension, he earnestly recommended them to adopt measures calculated to secure the happiness and union of all classes." The deficiency of the harvest of 1816, together with other causes of distress, and the acts of an ascendancy which was very galling to the great bulk of the population, pressed hardly upon Ireland at this period.

In the following year, when overtures were again made by Grattan on behalf of the moderate Catholics, Mr. Secretary Peel delivered a speech against Catholic Emancipation, which not only excited great interest, but drew forth high praise in certain quarters. This address

furnishes the key-note of all his anti-Catholic policy, and, strangely enough, it anticipated the very grounds upon which Mr. Gladstone justified his Irish legislation many years later. Speaking of the Catholics, Peel asked, "If you give them that fair proportion of political power to which their numbers, wealth, talents, and education will entitle them, can you believe that they will or can remain contented with the limits which you assign to them? Do you think that when they constitute, as they must do (not this year or next, but in the natural and therefore certain order of things), by far the most powerful body in Ireland—the body most controlling and directing the government of it—do you think, I say, that they will view with satisfaction the state of your Church or their own?" Here we have, briefly stated, the chief and most cogent reason for the disestablishment of the Irish Church. "May I not," demanded the orator in conclusion, "arguing from the motives by which man is actuated—from the feelings which nature inspires—may I not question the policy of admitting those who must have views hostile to the religious establishments of the State to the capacity of legislating for the interests of these establishments, and the power of directing the Government, of which these establishments form so essential a part?" While this speech was viewed with great favour by Wilberforce and others, Mackintosh spoke of it very moderately. Its principal argument was a specious one, and, admitting the rights of a minority such as the Protestant minority in Ireland, an irresistible one; but it was doomed to fall utterly before the advancing wave of public opinion and the logic of events. It was only a question of time how long England could continue to resist the Catholic claims, and to rule against the

express interest and wishes of the bulk of the Irish people.

Shortly after the delivery of the speech above quoted the orator had his reward, and this was no mean one. Mr. Abbot, the Speaker of the House of Commons, having been created a peer, a vacancy arose in the representation of the University of Oxford—that Blue Riband of Parliament to an Oxford man. Lords Eldon and Stowell immediately recommended Mr. Peel to the electors, and he was returned for a seat which was well known to have been coveted by Mr. Canning. The latter statesman, however, most generously said: “The representation of the University of Oxford has fallen into worthier hands. I rejoice with my right hon. friend near me in the high honour which he has obtained. Long may he enjoy the distinction, and long may it prove a source of reciprocal pride to our parent university and to himself.”

Having now held the post of Irish Secretary for six years—years of trouble and anxiety—Mr. Peel was desirous of being relieved from its duties. He therefore chose the time of his election for Oxford University, following close upon the special service he had but recently rendered in Parliament, for doing so. During his tenure of office he certainly discredited O’Connell’s denunciations. All the duties of his position he well and punctually performed, while “his life had been steady and decorous in a country where steadiness and decorum were peculiarly meritorious because they were not specially demanded.” The constabulary force which he established in Ireland (still known by the name of Peelers) ranks as the most permanent result of his administration, and it was justly regarded as forming the experimental or preliminary step



to the introduction of the system of metropolitan police, which in London has superseded the inconvenient and ineffective old watch system. Mr. Peel also effected some improvements in the grand jury system of Ireland, and endeavoured to alleviate the effects produced by an almost chronic condition of fever and famine. On his retirement from this very responsible office of Chief Secretary he had certainly left behind him a reputation for practical and administrative talents of no common order.

Although for the next four years Mr. Peel remained out of office, his talents were not allowed to rust, for early in 1819 he was appointed chairman of a committee, chosen, on the motion of Mr. Vansittart, Chancellor of the Exchequer, to inquire into the state of the Bank of England, with reference to the expediency of the resumption of cash payments. The result of the labours of the Committee on Currency was the introduction of a measure on which Peel's celebrity as a financier mainly rests, viz. the return to cash payments. A brief statement of the circumstances which led to the appointment of this committee is necessary.

In the year 1797 the Bank of England declared, with the consent of the Government, that its notes would not be converted, on presentation, into gold. This measure enabled the Bank to make large advances to the State, which otherwise would have been impossible, and without which the Government would have found it difficult to carry on the deadly struggle with France. But what were the commercial results of the measure? The value of a note for which the bank promised to pay gold some day or other depended of course upon the credit attached to the promise. No promise being exactly

equivalent to a performance, it was utterly impossible that a bank-note not immediately convertible into gold could have precisely the same value as gold. Gold, therefore, would have a value of its own, and a bank-note a value of its own. Moreover, as the value of the bank-note depended on the faith placed in it, if it had been merely required for home trade, the decrease in value would have been small, because the English people had confidence in the Bank of England and in the Government which sustained it. But in all foreign transactions the case was different. If an English merchant had to purchase goods on the Continent, and he sent out bank-notes, the merchant at St. Petersburg would have less confidence in the English bank-note than the Manchester merchant, and he would therefore say, "No, pay me in gold; or if you want to pay me in bank-notes, I will only take them at the value I place on them." In proportion, therefore, to the extent of purchases abroad was the natural abasement of paper money at home, and the increase in the value of gold as compared with paper.

Besides, paper-money resting on credit partook of the nature of public funds, depending also on credit. As the one fell naturally in a long and critical war, so the other fell from the same cause, though not in the same degree. All our dealings were thus carried on in a money which had a real value and a nominal one—the real value depending, in a great measure, on matters beyond our control. Efforts on the part of our legislature to control it were useless. We forbade the giving more for a guinea than twenty-one shillings in paper money, and we forbade the exchange of a twenty-shilling bank-note for less than twenty-shillings. We had, in short, to prevent gold and silver getting the same price in

England that they could get out of it. Our gold consequently went to those countries where it could obtain its real value, and England was drained. In course of time fifteen shillings in silver became equal to twenty shillings in paper. As has been pointed out, there is no possibility of keeping paper money on an equality with metallic money except by making the one immediately exchangeable for the other. This was the question which came before the Committee on Currency; and a difficult one it was, considering that for many years past every transaction in England had been carried on by paper. Seeing that paper money afforded great facilities in the carrying on of trade, it was feared that the sudden withdrawal of these facilities would be felt through every class of the population, and that the resumption of cash payments would involve great individual and public loss. And for this reason Mr. Horner was unsuccessful when he brought the question before the House of Commons in 1811. But in 1819 the matter was ripe for settlement, and Mr. Peel, who had previously held to the old opinions, now threw himself into the work. His father altogether differed from him as to the tendency of the measure; but it was asserted at the time that it rendered Sir Robert a more wealthy man, by something like half a million sterling, than he had previously been.

A curious scene took place in the House of Commons on the 24th of May. Sir Robert Peel rose and presented a petition in favour of a paper currency, and in doing so lamented his son's change of opinion. Mr. Peel himself then followed, introducing the measure for the resumption of cash payments, to which his father was opposed, but which had been adopted by the Committee. The ensuing passage from Peel's speech on this occasion did him



honour, from its frank avowal of a change of opinion ; and as the measure then introduced is chiefly associated with his name, it is of importance to reproduce it : " He was ready to avow, without shame or remorse, that he went into the Committee with a very different opinion from that which he at present entertained ; for his views of the subject were most materially different when he voted against the resolutions brought forward in 1811 by Mr. Horner, as chairman of the Bullion Committee. Having gone into the inquiry determined to dismiss all former impressions that he might have received, and to obliterate from his memory the vote which he had given some years since when the same question was discussed, he had resolved to apply to it his undivided and unprejudiced attention, and adopt every inference that authentic information or mature reflection should offer to his mind, and he had no hesitation in stating that, although he should probably even now vote, if it were again brought before the House, in opposition to the practical measure then recommended, he now, with very little modification, concurred in the principles laid down in the fourteen first resolutions submitted to the House by that very able and much-lamented individual. He conceived them to represent the true nature and laws of our monetary system. It was without shame or repentance he thus bore testimony to the superior sagacity of one with whose views he agreed on this point, although he differed so much from him on other great political questions ; but that distinguished statesman's opinions on this subject were such as must render his character still more respectable, and his loss more sensibly felt by the community at large."

, The speaker then went into an elaborate examina-

tion of the whole question, tracing carefully the various stages of its history, and concluded by submitting his resolutions to the House. A Bill was subsequently founded on them which quickly passed through both Houses and became law. It was not to be expected that such a measure could pass without having a disastrous if momentary effect upon the commercial world; but none the less did Peel feel that the time had come for restoring the currency to its former condition. A state of things which had subsisted since the time of Pitt could not be remedied without a severe wrench; but the country ultimately came to perceive, notwithstanding the predictions of crotchety financiers, that Peel's policy was wise and just. Certain landed proprietors, who had borrowed extensively during the period of depreciated currency, and whose estates were now heavily charged, suffered considerably; but these were only a very small minority compared with the numbers of those who experienced relief from the new fiscal changes. Cobbett was amongst those who predicted ruin to the country as the result of a return to cash payments; but his prophecy went unfulfilled, and Peel also lived down the charge that he had sacrificed the landed interest of the country to a whim on the subject of paper money.

Yet it is instructive as well as amusing to note that the charges against Peel died very hard. Fourteen years after the Currency Bill passed, Cobbett, who was member for Oldham, brought forward in the House of Commons a number of resolutions, setting forth the evils which he alleged had arisen from the resumption of cash payments, and proposing an address to the Crown for the removal from the Privy Council of Sir Robert Peel, as the author of that measure. In his lugubrious vaticinations,

Cobbett asserted that everything worthy of the name of property had been placed in jeopardy by that series of measures which began in 1819. "If, indeed, the sufferings which the nation has had to endure during these thirteen years had purchased for it security against further pecuniary convulsions, even then it would have been purchasing security at a dear rate. But this is not the case; it has only purchased for us greater insecurity than ever. It has been thirteen years of suffering, to purchase insecurity and peril, which are never to end until some convulsion come to put an end to our fears by realising that which we fear." The motion was seconded by Mr. John Fielden, a gentleman whose narrow views and tenacity of purpose earned for him the sobriquet of the "self-acting mule."

Peel defended his measures with great vigour and effect, and then turned upon Cobbett. "The hon. member has not the same motives for attacking me which he has had for attacking others. I have never lent the hon. member my confidence; from me he has never received any obligation. His object is, doubtless, to strike terror by the threat of his denunciations—to discourage opposition, from the fear of being signalised as a victim. But I tell the gentlemen of England that their best security is in boldly facing and defying such insidious efforts. God forbid that the hon. member's speculations on the subject of public confusion should be realised; I labour under no apprehensions that they will. I feel confident, whatever may be the political differences that divide public men, that all who are interested in the upholding of law and property will unite in their defence and put down such attempts. Not only would it be the greatest calamity,

but a calamity embittered by the greatest disgrace, to live under such an ignoble tyranny as this." Cobbett was only supported by five members out of a full House, and although the resolutions were entered as a matter of course in the minutes of the proceedings, on the motion of Lord Althorp they were directed to be expunged from the journals. The House felt that an unpardonable indignity was offered to one of its distinguished members. Our currency system rests undisturbed upon the principle restored by Peel, and the measure by which he achieved this reform was the first great stride towards that high reputation as a finance minister which he subsequently acquired and still continues to enjoy.

The policy of the Government in 1817 greatly discredited it with the country. This policy consisted chiefly in interference with the liberty of the subject, by the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, the prevention of public meetings, and the granting of warrants against persons accused of publishing libels and seditious papers. It suffered also a diminution of parliamentary strength by the election of 1818. In the following May Ministers were only able to secure a majority of two on the last motion made by Mr. Grattan upon the Catholic question; and they sustained actual defeats over Sir James Mackintosh's proposal for a Select Committee on Capital Punishments, and Lord Archibald Hamilton's motion for a reform of the Scotch burghs. But still more serious troubles followed.

On the 16th of August, 1819, was held the great Manchester reform gathering (called the *Peterloo* meeting), when from seventy to one hundred thousand persons were present. Henry Hunt, the well-known radical orator, took the chair, but had only uttered a few words when

the meeting was suddenly assailed by a body of cavalry, assisted by a Cheshire regiment of yeomanry, the outlets being occupied by other military detachments. The unarmed multitude were driven upon each other; many were trampled on by the horses or cut down by their riders. The deaths numbered eleven—men, women, and children—and the wounded about six hundred. Hunt was conveyed to prison, and locked up in a solitary cell. The country soon rang with the news of what was known as the "Manchester massacre." The Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, addressed the thanks of the Prince Regent to the Manchester magistrates and the military authorities "for their prompt, decisive, and efficient measures for the preservation of the public tranquillity on the 16th of August." But public meetings were speedily held all over the country, at which the proceedings were severely condemned, and stigmatised as despotic and murderous.

In the midst of great popular excitement, Parliament was called together on the 23rd of October, when the Government introduced a series of repressive measures described as the Six Acts. Peel, who of course had a close family connection with Manchester, undertook the defence of the magistrates during the debates. Premising that, notwithstanding his ties of birth and early acquaintance with Manchester, he should take an impartial and disinterested view of the transactions, he said he had come to the conclusion that the magistrates had been unjustly assailed. He then went over the history of events prior to the meeting, and maintained that from the information which the magistrates had received and the knowledge which they possessed of the state of feeling in Manchester and the neighbourhood, they were quite justified in the conduct they had pursued. As to the part which



Ministers had taken in thanking the magistrates, he conceived that they would have been guilty of a gross dereliction of duty if they had acted otherwise. "If," he said, "in the honest discharge of their duty, magistrates are to be thus treated, if the first act of Ministers should be to find a true bill against them, why, the result would turn out that instead of an unpaid and active body of magistrates, the local administration of justice would be confined to men who are now so much talked of, I mean stipendiary magistrates. I will appeal to the civil commotions in France—and I will ask what, on these occasions, has been the effect of ill-timed vigour, and what has been the effect of ill-timed concession? The fatal effects of the latter have been written in blood; and fatal, indeed, must the consequences be to this country, if Government is to be deterred by popular clamour from the performance of its duty, and induced to withhold an expression of its approbation from a course of measures which the circumstances of the time so fully warranted. I have said this much from the strong feeling of obligation which, I think, is due to the magistrates of Manchester, to whom is to be ascribed the rescue of that part of the country from the most imminent danger."

Peel probably exaggerated the risks to public order if the meeting had been allowed to proceed; for similar meetings had already been held, and others were held subsequently, at which no breach of the peace occurred. And the magistrates certainly cannot be absolved from blame for entrusting the execution of their warrant to the yeomanry—consisting largely of young men who acted with precipitation and utter lack of judgment. These troops became quite uncontrollable by their superior

officers when they had once been excited by the fancied derision of the populace. Certain other passages of Peel's speech—in which he drew a very unfavourable picture of the working classes in the manufacturing districts, and made some references to the manufacturers themselves—were not very happy, and gave great offence in the quarters indicated. "The middle classes in Manchester," Dr. Taylor observes, "who had stood aloof from radical violence, were at least equally averse to magisterial violence; and there grew up among them a strong desire for a share in parliamentary representation and for local self-government under a charter of incorporation. Peel's speech, by wounding their pride and representing them as essentially inferior to the agricultural body, greatly strengthened these feelings. The question of reform passed from the hands of the Radicals into those of the higher grade of the commercial community; and the Ministers, having overcome physical force, found themselves unexpectedly in the presence of a growing moral power, which gradually acquired such strength as to be irresistible." But this is anticipating. On the question of the Manchester proceedings Ministers were of course successful, the result being the passing of the Six Acts for the suppression of seditious meetings and publications. But the popularity of the Government was rapidly waning, and it received an additional blow from their refusal to prosecute a Government spy named Edwards, concerned in the abortive Cato Street conspiracy.

In the session of 1821 Mr. Peel spoke on two occasions of very great and general interest. The first was in relation to the proceedings taken against Queen Caroline, whose case had stirred the feelings of the whole community. The Marquis of Tavistock having brought

forward a motion condemning the conduct of Ministers in regard to this miserable business, Mr. Peel stood forth as their defender, though with some important reservations. In the course of his observations he said, "I lament that her Majesty's name has been excluded from the liturgy. I have with regret heard it stated that a palace is not to be provided for the Queen. I have read, with regret, the answer to her Majesty's demand of a ship of war. These are circumstances which make a [decided impression, not on enlightened minds, but on the great body of the people. From the refusal of the circumstances of accommodation to which I have alluded, an impression has prevailed that the Queen is the object of persecution. It is an unjust and erroneous impression; but the circumstances I have mentioned have materially contributed to produce it." Ministers won in the House, but their course was severely condemned in the country.

It is, however, to the second speech of Peel this session that we are desirous of calling particular attention; for it demonstrates that at this period his opinions were beginning to waver upon the greatest question which then agitated the public mind. On the 28th of February Mr. Plunket once more brought before the House the subject of the Catholic claims, in a speech of surpassing power and eloquence. That address ranks amongst the finest specimens of parliamentary oratory of the present century. Especially thrilling was the passage in which the speaker passed in review the distinguished men who had advocated this measure of relief for the Catholics—a list beginning with Fox and Burke, and ending with Grattan. "Walking before the sacred images of those illustrious dead," said the speaker, "as in a



public and solemn procession, shall we not dismiss all unworthy prejudices? I will not talk of triumph; I will not mix in this act of public justice anything that can awaken personal animosity." Then followed a strong personal adjuration to Peel, succeeded by this striking passage: "The Catholic does not indulge the chimerical notion of heaving the British constitution from its basis that his priest may wear lawn sleeves and a mitre. If, however, he is excluded from the privileges of the State merely on account of his religion; if he is made an invidious exception in a country which permits the talents and virtues of all other men to advance them to the highest honours; and if this exception extend to his posterity, *nati natorum, et qui nascentur ab illis*—they will indeed have a sufficient motive to aim at the destruction of that State which heaps upon them only so heavy a load of injustice."

We are told that the appeal and the eulogy upon himself touched Peel deeply, and that for some moments he seemed unnerved. He commenced his remarkable reply by paying a high tribute both to Grattan and Plunket: the former had met with a congenial supporter in the person of the latter, "one fit to be the successor of the eloquent and intrepid statesman who had preceded him; and one than whom no man was more worthy to wield the arms of Achilles." Mr. Peel admitted that he did not view the existing state of things with complacency, and it was not the love of victory, but the sincere desire to state his honest conviction, which made him come forward. He had opposed Catholic Emancipation because, amongst other things, it must lead to the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. If a Roman Catholic were admitted to a seat in

Parliament and other offices, so also must the Quaker ; and the principle involved would lead to such innovations upon the British constitution that he, for one, must be permitted to oppose it. He further asked the House to recollect that it was legislating for posterity, and he could not shut his eyes to the danger in which such a proposition as the present might possibly involve the country. The closing passages of Peel's speech, which we give entire, had certainly not that ring about them to which the House was accustomed in listening to the unpromising opponents of Catholic Emancipation. " If I thought the claims contended for were formed to promote the good of the State, the whole voice of England out of doors should not dissuade me from admitting the necessity of their adoption. It is, however, because I think the motion not calculated to promote any good purpose that I am prepared to oppose it to the utmost of my means. My opinions and my duty here coincide, and upon them I mean consistently to act. Upon this occasion I have declined resorting to any influence to counteract the fair consideration of the question. I have been, it is true, consulted about the means of opposing it ; and I now solemnly declare that my advice was against, rather than for, petitioning to impede the progress of this Bill. I have told the parties by whom I have been consulted that I care not for their petitions ; I value them not ; for, in my view, the House of Commons is fully competent to decide upon the whole merits of the case without any external assistance. I think we require no illumination from without to enable us to form a sound decision upon whatever question is submitted to our consideration. This being my opinion, I have given no encouragement to counter-petitioning upon

this great question. I can most conscientiously assure the House that no result of this debate can give me unqualified satisfaction. I am of course bound to wish that the opinions which I honestly feel may prevail ; but their prevalence must still be mingled with regret at the disappointment which I know that the success of such opinions must entail on a large portion of my fellow-subjects. If, however, on the contrary, the motion succeeds, no man who hears me will more cordially rejoice if my predictions prove unfounded, my arguments groundless, and if the result should exemplify the sanguine expectations of the right hon. mover, and give increased confidence to all classes of his Majesty's subjects in that interesting country, in which such union and harmony are desirable."

Plunket and his friends might well take heart of grace from these utterances. A considerable step towards conversion had already been made when Peel was obliged to confess that no result of the debate could give him unqualified satisfaction. Such language is not that of a stern opponent, but rather of one who is beginning to feel the cogency of arguments which he has hitherto resolutely swept aside. Though he still clung to his old convictions, and was prepared to postpone the period of surrender to the Catholic claims as long as possible, Peel's words would seem to indicate an incipient conviction that such surrender must sooner or later become inevitable.

## CHAPTER III.

### HOME SECRETARY.

IT became evident towards the close of 1821 that if the Liverpool Ministry desired to prolong its existence, it could only do so by a strong infusion of new blood. The Premier consequently made overtures to the Grenvillites, the result being very considerable changes in the *personnel* of the Government. These changes, involving as they did the admission of several liberal-minded men into the Cabinet, were very distasteful to the ultra-Tory Chancellor, Lord Eldon. The Marquis of Wellesley, a staunch supporter of the Catholic claims, was appointed Lord Lieutenant. Mr. Winn took the place of the Marquis of Buckingham at the Board of Control, and Mr. Peel became Home Secretary in the room of Lord Sidmouth. This nobleman's tenure of office in the Home Department had been signalised only by mediocrity and an abstention from all reforming measures. His lordship's opportunities from the first moment of his entry upon official life had been very great, but his performances had been poor indeed. We have seen the nature of his policy in the "Manchester Massacre." His career was consistent in one point only, viz. in its uniform opposition to all popular concessions. Lord

Sidmouth, however, was a great favourite with George III., and in this lies the secret of that political influence which he possessed—an influence which had been sufficient to ensure him a post in every administration for many years back. He was an exceedingly dull man, and never performed during his official career but one stroke of high policy (for such he regarded it), to wit, the conclusion of the Peace of Amiens, which Peace he forthwith proceeded to undo by his subsequent acts. In the post which he now yielded to a better man he had done as much harm as his limited faculties permitted him to accomplish.

It was only natural that Peel should take very different views from Lord Sidmouth respecting the duties of a Home Secretary. A much less enlightened man than himself, who had ventured to look fairly in the face the operation of our civil and criminal laws at that time, must have been driven to the conclusion that these laws were a scandal and a disgrace to English civilisation. Peel, at any rate, was not long in coming to this conclusion, though it is with feelings of amazement that we reflect on the fact that Lord Eldon and Lord Ellenborough did not think it safe to abolish the punishment of death in a case of stealing six shillings from a shop! We learn with a thrill of horror of fourteen persons being hanged in London in one week, in the year 1820, many of them for crimes of a trivial character. Well might Bentham, Romilly, Mackintosh, and their fellow-workers resolve to leave no stone unturned until these stringent and sanguinary laws should no longer hold their place in the Statute Book.

By way of proving the Herculean nature of the task which lay before the reformers of our Criminal Code, we



will cite certain facts illustrating the condition of things subsisting before and at the time of Peel's acceptance of the office of Home Secretary. In the fifty years ending with 1820 there had been hung in London alone one thousand three hundred and seventy-one persons. The pillory was a favourite mode of punishment; and Prior, in his "Life of Burke," records a case in which a man who was of very small stature and short-necked was nevertheless forced into the pillory, where he hung by his head rather than walked as the instrument revolved. The mob attacked him with great fury, and when the officers opened the pillory the poor wretch fell down dead on the stand. As regards the condition of our prisons, it was such as to fill a humane man with disgust and indignation. Fortunately there sprang up a noble philanthropist who determined to open the eyes of England upon this question. John Howard well deserved the eulogium of Jeremy Bentham, that "in the scale of moral desert, the labours of the legislator and the writer are as far below his as earth is below heaven. He died a martyr after living an apostle." Burke's tribute to this large-souled man was equally fine and thorough. "His plan is original," the illustrious orator observed, "and it is as full of genius as it is of humanity. It was a voyage of discovery; a circumnavigation of charity. Already the benefit of his labour is felt more or less in every country. I hope he will anticipate its final reward by seeing all its effects fully realised in his own."

In Parliament Sir Samuel Romilly was one of the great pioneers in the reformation of the Criminal Code, and he was ably seconded by Sir James Mackintosh. When the former entered upon his parliamentary career there were no fewer than three hundred crimes punish-



able with death in England, a number which was greatly reduced by his persistent and self-denying efforts. Mackintosh's eloquence was concentrated on the same cause, and in the year 1822 he was successful in carrying a motion in the House of Commons to the effect "that this House will at an early period of the next session of Parliament take into their most serious consideration the means of increasing the efficacy of the criminal laws by abating their undue rigour." In the following year, accordingly, Sir James Mackintosh again brought forward his motion, but it was set aside, and the previous question carried, in consequence of an announcement by Peel that the Government intended to take up the whole subject. Before the session closed the Home Secretary gave an earnest that he intended fulfilling his pledges to the letter, by introducing four bills, all with the specific object of mitigating the severity of the Criminal Code; and these measures passed into law.

The central authority of Government having been now galvanised into action, the beneficent work proceeded apace. In 1825 Peel introduced and carried an important act for consolidating and amending the laws relating to juries. The reform of the Courts of Common Law and Chancery was, in fact, pressed forward in the two sessions of 1824—25; but it was not until 1828 that Brougham procured the appointment of a commission to inquire into the state of the law. In that year also was carried an important measure for consolidating and amending the statutes in England relating to offences against the person. Another question which occupied Peel's attention two years later was that of capital punishment in cases of forgery, the law being extremely severe

on this crime. The result of Peel's efforts was to limit the punishment considerably. Mackintosh and his friends did not consider that the Minister's proposals, which were endorsed by the House of Lords, went far enough.

Besides these reforms in the criminal law, there still remains to be mentioned one subject in relation to which Peel rendered conspicuous service. Speaking of the police force of London in 1828, a writer in the *Quarterly Review* remarked that "the whole of the existing watch system of London should be mercilessly struck to the ground." Mr. Peel, convinced also of the utter inefficiency of the force, obtained a select committee to inquire into the subject. The investigations demonstrated the inadequacy of the existing system, and led to the establishment of the Metropolitan Police Force, a body whose duties extended to a radius of twelve miles from Charing Cross. A competent authority has observed that the committee of 1828 left its plain mark in the annals of police legislation, inasmuch as it paved the way to Peel's Act of the following year. By this Act "a large approach was made towards that cardinal point in police reform—the separation of the incongruous functions of thief-taker and judge—and an effective constabulary force was established under the control of two commissioners. This Act, it is true, left many petty, detached, and independent bodies of peace officers in certain districts of the metropolis, irrespectively of the City of London, to which it did not at all apply. And to this extent it contained the seeds of future embarrassment in the proper working of the new constabulary. But if the state of parties in 1829 be borne in mind, if it be remembered how greatly Sir Robert Peel's political position was hampered by the results of his manly conflicts for the Catholic Relief Bill,

and how imperfectly public opinion was enlightened on the true importance of the police measure, even after all that had been said and done in relation to it, the surprise will rather be that he effected so much than that he did no more." But, in truth, the whole of Peel's policy at the Home Office was in striking contrast to the policy of *laissez faire* pursued by his predecessor. If he still lagged behind upon some great and pressing questions during the chief part of his tenure of that office, in matters of social and legal reform he set an example to his successors the results of which it would be impossible fully to calculate. The fact that the time was ripe for these reforms does not detract from the merit of the statesman who gave them the concrete form of legislation.

In a speech made soon after Mr. Canning's accession to office in 1827, Peel alluded to his own services at the Home Office in language which savoured somewhat of egotism, but which found its justification in the unjust attacks made upon him at that time. "I have the satisfaction of reflecting," he said, "that every institution, civil and military, connected with my office during the last four years has been subjected to close inspection and strict review; and that I have been able to make such temperate and gradual reforms as I thought were consistent with the general and permanent good. I have also the gratification of knowing that every law found on the Statute Books when I entered office, which imposed any temporary or extraordinary restraint on the liberty of the subject, has been either repealed or suffered to expire. I may be a Tory; I may be illiberal; but the fact is undeniable, that when I first entered upon the duties of the Home Department there were laws in existence which imposed upon the subjects of this realm

unusual and extraordinary restrictions. The fact is undeniable that those laws have been effaced. Tory as I am, I have the further satisfaction of knowing that there is not a single law connected with my name which has not had for its object some mitigation of the severity of the criminal law, some prevention of abuse in the exercise of it, or some security for its impartial administration. I may also recollect with pleasure, that during the several trials to which the manufacturing interests have been exposed during the winter of the last two years, I have preserved internal tranquillity without applying to the House for measures of extraordinary severity." The boast was legitimate, if we regard the measure and scope of the acts which bear the apologist's name.

Other questions which arose during Peel's tenure of office—besides those connected with criminal legislation—demand some attention. His great measure for the resumption of cash payments still rankled in the minds of many of its opponents, and during the debates on the Marquis of Londonderry's motion in 1822 for a Committee on Agricultural Distress, Peel vindicated his policy on the currency. He observed that, while he still renounced the merit of the measure, he took his share of the responsibility. After all the clamour which had been raised, he was as much disposed to maintain its justice and policy as when it was first introduced. The measure was in itself wise and conducive to the general interests of the empire ; the agricultural interests had not been depressed by its operation, and whatever depression they had since experienced was in no peculiar degree to be ascribed to it. Recalling to the mind of the House the year 1819, he showed that our manu-

facturing and commercial transactions were not sound, because the manufacturers depended on a state of the currency which had no security. The poor-rates had been greatly reduced since the passing of the Bill, and he demanded what greater good could be effected than such a reduction, which must be ascribed to the additional means of living conferred by the rise in the value of wages produced by the restoration of the metallic standard. "I believe," he said in conclusion, "the clamour against the return to a metallic currency to be only temporary; and that at the end of three or four years we shall look back with heartfelt pleasure and gratulation to our return to cash payments. By firmness, constancy, and perseverance in the present system, I feel convinced that, at no remote period, we shall derive all those advantages from it which the warmest friends of the measure contemplated at its enactment."

In the same session Peel delivered a speech on the all-absorbing Catholic question, which, while undoubtedly powerful from his point of view, was no sufficient answer to the arguments of Canning and Plunket. This question was moving on, and moving rapidly, to a solution. Mr. Canning brought forward a motion for the reinstatement of the Catholic peers in their political privileges. The right to sit and vote without being required to take the oath of supremacy had been enjoyed by the Catholic peers from the time of Elizabeth until the year 1678, when, in the midst of a great anti-papist agitation, a measure was passed excluding all Catholic peers from their seats in Parliament. Canning's description of the anomalies under which the Catholics laboured was very powerful. He also drew a vivid picture of the recent coronation, when the barons who



did homage were headed by a Catholic peer, Lord Clifford, and the higher grades in the peerage were headed by a Catholic, the premier Duke, his Grace of Norfolk. Canning asked whether it occurred to the representatives of Europe, when contemplating this animating spectacle, "that, after being thus exhibited to the eyes of the peers and people of England, and to the representatives of the princes and nations of the world, the Duke of Norfolk, highest in rank among the peers, the Lord Clifford, and others like him, representing a long line of illustrious ancestry, as if called forth and furnished for the occasion, like the lustres and banners that flamed and glittered in the scene, were to be, like them, thrown by as useless and trumpery formalities?—that they might bend the knee and kiss the hand, that they might bear the train or rear the canopy, might discharge the offices assigned by Roman pride to their barbarian ancestry—

‘*Purpurea tollant aulæa Britanni* ;’

but that with the pageantry of the hour their importance faded away; that as their distinction vanished their humiliation returned; and that he who headed the procession of the peers to-day could not sit among them as their equal to-morrow?”

The eloquent orator made many other equally incisive points, which rendered it very difficult for Mr. Secretary Peel to follow him. The latter admitted indeed, in commencing his address, that he appeared at a disadvantage, when the feelings of members were warmed and their passions inflamed by the splendid imagery and the imposing eloquence of his right hon. friend. Cold reasoning and sober views of the question were all that he was



competent to present. On one part of the question, nevertheless—the historical—Peel was forcible in his reply. The exclusion of the Catholic peers he maintained could not be traced up to the Popish plot or any particular act, but was to be accounted for on a general reference to the history of the times. It was an Act founded on the policy of the legislature of 1678, and confirmed at the period of the Revolution; confirmed at the period when the Bill of Rights was passed and when a Popish King was excluded from the throne. The exclusion of Catholics was due to no mere jealousy of a Popish successor. Peel then narrated the terms of the proposed treaty between Charles II. and Louis XIV., and asked: “When it is said that, at the time of the Revolution, there was no cause for jealousy of the Catholic peers, should it not have been borne in mind that this disgraceful treaty was concluded by the advice of Lord Arlington, Lord Clifford, and Lord Arundel of Wardour, three Roman Catholic peers? Is it surprising, then, that, independent of the Popish plot, there should have existed a peculiar jealousy of the Catholic peers?” This argument, though effective in its way, had no practical bearing upon the Catholic question as it stood in 1822. The speaker next detailed the reasons which, he considered, justified the exclusion of the Catholic peers; but he was answered by Plunket, who, in returning to the legislation of Charles II., said that the innocent had been proscribed and punished because an Exclusion Bill could not be carried; the guiltless were attainted because the proper object of attack could not be reached. Mr. Canning’s motion was carried by a majority of five, and in consequence of a half intimation from Mr. Peel that the whole question

should be considered in the following session, the narrow majority of five was increased to twelve on the second reading ; but the measure was thrown out by the Lords.

In the session of 1822, as in many sessions since, Irish legislation occupied a conspicuous place. A Government measure was introduced for establishing a permanent constabulary force in Ireland ; and Mr. Peel, who had done much to alleviate the terrible distress then prevalent in Munster and Connaught, explained the scheme. It provided for a stipendiary magistracy (which led the way to a revision of the lists of justices in the southern counties of Ireland) and an organized police force with military uniform and discipline. In its operation the measure was productive of immense benefit to the suffering country.

Towards the close of 1822 important changes took place in the Ministry. Canning became Foreign Secretary, Mr. Robinson was appointed to the Chancellorship of the Exchequer, Mr. Huskisson to the Board of Trade, and Mr. Arbuthnot to the Land Revenue Department. Canning's influence, which was growing, was regarded as dangerous to Peel, and the latter was now surrounded by colleagues with whom he was not in sympathy. When the question of the Holy Alliance was raised in 1823, it fell to Peel's lot to reply in the place of Canning (not yet re-elected) to a fervent speech by Brougham ; but his language on that occasion was regarded as too moderate and not sufficiently emphatic. Peel's Irish policy was criticised during a debate which arose over a riot in the Dublin theatre ; and on this occasion he spoke with vigour and earnestness, and challenged the country to produce any instance in which, while he held office, an impartial administration of the laws had been denied.

During the same debate an extraordinary scene occurred. Brougham, after acknowledging that the attitude of Peel upon the Catholic claims had always been the same—single-hearted, plain, manly, and upright—went on to charge Canning with the most incredible specimen of monstrous truckling for the purpose of obtaining office that the whole history of political tergiversation could furnish. Canning immediately sprang up, and in the most emphatic manner exclaimed, “I rise to say that that is false.” This remark fell like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky. But when the first feeling of astonishment was over, the silence was so complete that it is stated the fall of a pen, which one of the clerks let drop upon the matting, was heard in the remotest parts of the House. The Speaker required Mr. Canning to withdraw his disorderly expression, but the latter declared that though he was sorry to violate the decorum of the House, no consideration on earth should induce him to retract the assertion. The incident closed by a kind of semi-reconciliation, Peel observing that “nothing could by possibility be more free from the imputation of truckling than the manner in which his right hon. friend had accepted office.”

When Lord Nugent brought in a Bill to extend to the English Roman Catholics the same constitutional privileges and political franchises which were enjoyed by their co-religionists in Ireland, Mr. Peel assented to leave being given. With regard to the elective franchise, he allowed at once that he was willing to admit the English Catholic to that privilege, but he should strenuously resist their being themselves elected. In this respect they would stand in the same position as the clergy, who were qualified to elect, but were disqualified to sit as

representatives in the House. With regard to the magistracy, he agreed that it might be advisable that Roman Catholics should be associated with Protestants in the exercise of magisterial duties; but on the question of admission to offices he begged to reserve himself. The Bill passed the House of Commons by a large majority, but in the Lords it was rejected by seven votes, chiefly through the exertions of Lord Eldon.

At this period Peel and Canning began to drift widely asunder. The ability of the former, great as it was, began to be overshadowed by the brilliant talents of the latter, and they were regarded as rivals. Conscious of this, neither took the trouble to endeavour to draw the bonds of their relationship closer together. So long as Canning held a seat in the House of Commons, Peel could never hope to be Prime Minister, while his colleague was every day becoming more popular with the country. There was not the least personal ill-feeling between the two; but on several matters of imperial policy they held divergent views. It was not a little singular that Canning, on the first day of the session of 1824, expressed his continued adherence to the cause of Catholic Emancipation, while Peel still maintained his resolute attitude of opposition to these claims. The Home Secretary now gravitated more than ever towards the Eldon section of the Cabinet, and when the Lord Chancellor was attacked, and threatened with an inquiry into the business of the Court of Chancery, he stood forward in the Commons as his defender. But once or twice during this session Peel spoke upon Irish questions in such a manner as to denote a growing liberality of view. Overtures were made to Canning by Lord Althorp to settle the Irish problem off hand, but the Leader of the House

of Commons replied that it was impossible for him to rely on the support of the Whigs, pledged as that party was to Parliamentary Reform. He was in no condition to accept the co-operation of the gentlemen opposite. "Our banquet might be mingled for a time, but soon we must stand on adverse sides."

The King's speech at the opening of the session of 1825 referred to the contentment and prosperity of the people, but admitted that dangerous associations existed in Ireland which endangered the peace of society and retarded the cause of national improvement. Brougham once more pressed the Catholic claims, and with bitter sarcasm said, "Let the right hon. gentleman (Canning) say that he will resign if the Catholic question is not carried in the Cabinet; let the noble and learned lord (Eldon) say he will resign if it *is* carried. I am quite sure of the result. The Catholic question will be carried, but the noble and learned lord will retain his place. He will behave with the fortitude which has distinguished him in the other instances in which he has been defeated, and the country will not be deprived for a single hour of his inestimable services." Peel again defended the unpopular Chancellor, predicting that he would go down to posterity as a man of great and exalted merits, and as the most consistent politician who had ever held the great seal. As to the Catholic claims, he added that his original view had been strengthened and confirmed by the experience of subsequent events. At the time he thus strongly spoke Peel was almost alone on this question, fighting against the Catholic claims, but fighting, as he must himself by this time have been convinced, hopelessly. The Irish administration was pursuing a different policy from that which was pursued when



he (Peel) was its ruling spirit ; and his most distinguished colleagues believed that the day could not be far distant when the Catholic claims must be conceded. Altogether the position he occupied at this juncture was one of extreme difficulty. The Catholics had one hope, and only one, as regarded Peel. His most recent utterances showed that he was open to be convinced on the question of expediency, and to effect this they now addressed themselves. But the time was not yet come.

The second reading of a Catholic Emancipation Bill had been carried in the Commons by a majority of twenty-nine—many converts having been made to the measure—when, on the 25th of April, the Duke of York presented a petition in the House of Lords against the Bill, and startled the House and the country by a declaration which he then made to the effect that he should oppose the Catholic claims to the latest moment of his existence, adding, “ whatever may be my situation of life, so help me God ! ” Peel was himself greatly disturbed in mind upon the whole subject, and on the third reading of the Bill in the Lower House much speculation was caused by this sentence which fell from his lips : “ I have, at least, not been instrumental in exciting or encouraging any false hopes in the minds of the Roman Catholics, and I therefore—*perhaps for the last time*—shall now, by my vote, attest my uncompromising opposition to this Bill, which proposes to grant them all that they claim.” ~~The Bill was lost by a majority of forty-eight in the Lords ;~~ but the Duke of York’s asseveration had caused much disquietude even in the minds of some of those who were opposed to Catholic Emancipation. They were anxious to allay public feeling on the subject, whereas the Duke’s speech could only embitter and strengthen it.



A new Parliament met in November, 1826, and Peel speedily found himself distanced by Canning in the popular estimation to a yet greater degree than before. In the debate on the Address the Foreign Secretary delivered one of the most eloquent speeches ever listened to in the House of Commons, chiefly against the Holy Alliance, which was now moribund. In the peroration of this speech occurred two passages which have since been frequently quoted: "We go to Portugal," said the speaker, "not to rule, not to dictate, not to prescribe constitutions, but to defend and to preserve the independence of an ally. We go to plant the standard of England on the well-known heights of Lisbon. Where that standard is planted foreign dominion shall not come." Again, "Contemplating Spain, such as our ancestors had known her, I resolved that if France had Spain, it should not be Spain with the Indies. I called the new world into existence to redress the balance of the old." Canning, indeed, was dazzling the country by his foreign policy, and his spirited conduct, combined with his extraordinary talents, made him by far the most conspicuous figure in the Ministry.

The sudden illness of Lord Liverpool in February, 1827, set speculation afloat upon possible ministerial changes, while the death of the Duke of York removed from the sphere of public life the most powerful and persistent opponent of the Catholic claims. Alluding to the latter event, however, Peel said, "The influence of some great names has recently been lost to the cause which I support, but I have never adopted my opinions on that cause either from deference to high station or—that which might more fairly be expected to impress me—high ability. Keen as the feelings of regret must be

with which the loss of those associates in feeling is recollected, it is still a matter of consolation to me that I have now an opportunity of showing that if my opinions are unpopular I stand by them still, when the influence and authority that might have given them currency is gone, and when it is impossible, I believe, that in the mind of any human being I can stand suspected of pursuing my principles with any view to favour or personal aggrandizement." This speech only widened the gulf between Peel and Canning. "The rival candidates had set up their banners," says one writer, "and issued the declarations of their pretensions to the office of Premier; Canning, in his speech on the expedition to Portugal, had taken for his cry, 'Liberality in Foreign Affairs,' and Peel had now chosen, 'Exclusiveness in Domestic Politics.'"

At the close of March, in consequence of the continued illness of the Earl of Liverpool, the King summoned Canning to Windsor to advise with him on the future of the Ministry. The King would have no Ministry pledged to the settlement of the Catholic claims, and Canning agreed to leave it an open question, but stipulated that the new Premier should not be one holding the opinions of Lord Liverpool. This was an indirect reference to the Duke of Wellington, whose name was now freely discussed in connection with the Premiership, and who was not only anti-Catholic, but leaned towards the Holy Alliance abroad, and was the enemy of progressive measures at home. The upshot of Canning's interview with the King was that the Minister advised the formation of an anti-Catholic Administration; but his Majesty did not concur in the advice. Palace intrigues in favour of the Duke of Wellington

now went forward, and several great nobles intimated the withdrawal of their support if Mr. Canning were placed at the helm. Peel also let it be distinctly known that he should resign if a person favourable to the Catholic claims were appointed to the Premiership. At a meeting between Peel and Canning, the former named the Duke of Wellington as a statesman whose appointment would solve all difficulties ; but Canning strongly dissented from this. In a letter to Lord Eldon, Peel pointed out that he could not serve under Canning without laying himself open to misconstruction with respect to his views on the Catholic question ; but if the Ministry could be reconstructed by Canning, himself alone retiring, he should retire in perfect good humour, and without the slightest disappointment. Early in April Canning received his Majesty's commands to submit immediately a plan for the reconstruction of the Administration. Eldon, Peel, the Duke of Wellington, and Lord Westmoreland declined to serve under the Foreign Secretary, and others followed their example, until Canning was left with only Harrowby, Robinson, Huskisson, and Wynn, as the remnants of Lord Liverpool's Ministry. He gained some powerful adhesions, however. The Duke of Clarence assumed the office of Lord High Admiral ; Canning combined the offices of Chancellor of the Exchequer and First Lord of the Treasury ; Mr. Robinson became Secretary for the Colonies, and went to the Upper House as Lord Goderich ; Lord Anglesey became Master-General of the Ordnance ; Lord Dudley was appointed Foreign Secretary ; and Mr. Sturges Bourne accepted the office of Home Secretary.

There were those who predicted the impossibility of a Canning Administration ; but at least it was safely

formed, though there were very strong elements outside it. Peel has been blamed for throwing in his lot with the Duke of Wellington at this juncture, as against Canning. But, as Lord Dalling and Bulwer asks, "Was it to be expected that he should leave that section of the Ministry where he was a chief to join another where he would be a subordinate? What part could he play amidst Mr. Canning and his friends, joined by a certain portion of the Whigs, with whom he was a perfect stranger? and for what public object was he called upon to make this private sacrifice?" It was not proposed to settle the great question upon which he joined issue with Mr. Canning; and in a composite Cabinet this question could not but give rise to constant difficulties. There is little doubt that personal feeling swayed the three leading statesmen at the time, but such feeling was in no sense an unworthy one; and if Peel preferred to serve under the Duke of Wellington rather than under his more brilliant rival, his choice had at least nothing dishonourable in it. Although misrepresented by others, the chief actors in this ministerial drama quite understood one another, and did not impute vindictive motives to each other as the basis of the choice they respectively made.

Canning assumed office with the support of several leading Liberals, but his difficulties speedily began. Upon the reassembling of Parliament on the 1st of May, Peel made a personal statement to the effect that he had determined to sacrifice office rather than abandon that course which he had previously pursued for so long a time, and which he had continued while in possession of the office he lately held. But he added, "If any arrangement could have been made so as to secure to

the office of Prime Minister sufficient weight, and to me the same principles, I was perfectly content to remain in office, and was desirous to act either with or under my right hon. friend, and to see him possessed of all the influence and authority belonging to his high station. I also beg leave to state that I declared to my right hon. friend that the Catholic question, and my position in respect to it, in the particular office I held, constituted my only objection to embark under his pilotage." This frank and unmistakable language disposes of any charge of unworthy personal feeling on Peel's part.

The questions of Parliamentary Reform and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts now began to be mooted, and Peel gave notice that he should strenuously resist all movements in these directions. Earl Grey, who had now been abandoned by some of the best men of his own party, severely denounced the head of the new Ministry in the House of Lords. He declared that Canning was one of the worst enemies of those beneficial measures which he (Lord Grey) was desirous of conferring upon the country. This blow to the Government was followed by difficulties of a legislative character, exhibiting divided counsels; and altogether the cares of office weighed very heavily upon the new Premier. He was speedily destined to be relieved from them by the hand of death. Parliament was prorogued on the 2nd of July, and Mr. Canning, who had long been ailing, went to the Duke of Devonshire's villa at Chiswick to recruit his health. Disease, however, had taken too sure a hold upon his frame; inflammation set in, and on the 8th of August he expired. He had been hunted to death, it was said; and it cannot be denied that the sensibilities of this distinguished statesman, who could feel most keenly, were deeply wounded



on many occasions. The feeling of sorrow at his death was very acute. Those who differed from Canning most widely acknowledged the extraordinary powers of one who, by his own inherent energy and talents, elevated himself to the proud position of Prime Minister of England.

Lord Goderich succeeded to the Premiership, and the Duke of Wellington returned to office as Commander-in-Chief; but Mr. Peel held aloof. The foreign policy of the new Government, culminating in the battle of Navarino, offended the Tory section of the Cabinet, who had regarded the Greeks as rebels against their legitimate sovereign. Lord Goderich found himself in a difficulty, and turned to the Whigs. But his intention became apparent to the Tories, and the latter determined to checkmate his plans. Unable to make his choice between the two rival political parties, the Premier resigned, and the Goderich Administration was no more.



## CHAPTER IV.

### CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION.

AFTER the collapse of the Goderich Ministry the Duke of Wellington formed a Tory Government, in which, nevertheless, there were some liberalising elements. Mr. Peel again became Home Secretary, but he was now also leader of the House of Commons, and undoubtedly the moving spirit of the Administration. Lord Lyndhurst took the place of that unbending enemy of progress, Lord Eldon, and the Cabinet also included Mr. Huskisson, Lord Dudley, and Lord Palmerston. Peel's time had now come, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that he owed his position neither to favour nor to intrigue, but to those talents which, if not of the loftiest order, were yet equally essential to success in the Parliamentary arena. The policy of the new Government was one of compensation. Unable to concede the demands for administrative reform, they decided to lighten the burdens of the people, and by this alternative legislation thus to secure their stability as a ministry. Beneficent as much of their legislation was, however, it was regarded as but the staving off of still greater measures that must ultimately come.

When Lord John Russell brought forward his motion

for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, it was opposed by the Government; but Mr. Peel's speech on that occasion was a virtual admission that he could not struggle against the measure. He believed, he said, that the practical grievances which the Acts imposed upon the Dissenters had been exaggerated, but added, "I can only say, that so great is my respect for that large and respectable body denominated Protestant Dissenters, that if I could be satisfied that they really labour under such grievances as have been described I should be very strongly induced to vote for the repeal of the Acts complained of." He concluded by expressing his regret that the question had not been allowed to remain quiescent; and that he should give a vote which must be attended with disappointment to a class of persons for whom he had the highest respect. This being the strongest defence the Ministry could make, it was obvious that the destruction of the Acts was at hand. Lord John Russell's motion was carried by a majority of forty-four; and not quite a month later Peel adopted the Bill as a Government measure, stipulating that a simple declaration should be substituted for the sacramental test. In this form the measure passed. It afterwards went through the Upper House—being supported by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, but opposed by Lord Eldon—and became law. Shortly after this the Ministry underwent some important changes. Mr. Huskisson, in opposition to his colleagues, voted for the transfer of the franchise of East Retford—lost on account of bribery—to the already large borough of Birmingham. Having done so, the Minister resigned, although he did not wish his letter to be taken *au sérieux*. But the Duke of Wellington declined to regard the resignation in any other light, and Mr. Hus-

kisson was succeeded at the Colonial Office by Sir G. Murray. At the same time Lord Dudley was succeeded at the Foreign Office by the Earl of Aberdeen; Sir Henry Hardinge succeeded Lord Palmerston at the War Office; and Mr. Charles Grant gave place to Mr. Vesey Fitzgerald at the Board of Trade.

Peel gave evidence in this session that he was moving onwards. At the instance of Brougham, he consented to the issue of two commissions, one to inquire into the state of the common law, the other to take into consideration, the state of the law of real property. He also carried a measure, which had been rejected in the preceding session, for regulating the import duties on corn. Duty was substituted for prohibition, and a sliding scale was adopted. This disturbance of the old law of protection, though slight, indicated the course of subsequent legislation on the subject of the Corn Laws. When the question of the currency was again raised by a Bill introduced to prevent the circulation of small Scotch notes, Peel again defended the cause of hard money as against paper, and the Government majority was greatly increased.

But the great question of Catholic Emancipation speedily overshadowed all others. It was brought to a head by the result of the Clare election and other incidents, amongst which was the resolve of the Catholic Association to nominate Roman Catholics at all future elections, thus keeping up a perpetual war on the subject. Daniel O'Connell was elected for Clare, in opposition to the new Minister, Mr. Vesey Fitzgerald; and Lord Anglesey, the gallant but blunt Irish Lord-Lieutenant, declared that there was no way of dealing with the Catholic organization but by satisfying the Catholics.

His lordship wrote a letter in which he stated his views without circumlocution, and there was no course left for the Government to take but to recall him immediately, and appoint the Duke of Northumberland viceroy in his stead. But it soon became obvious to the Duke of Wellington and Mr. Peel that there was only one method of settling this long-vexed question; and the country was shortly startled by the announcement that the Government had themselves resolved to propose a measure for the relief of the Catholics. In a memorandum addressed to the Duke of Wellington on the 25th of August, 1828, Mr. Peel had thus expressed his convictions on the subject: "I have proved to you, I hope, that no false delicacy, no fear of the imputation of inconsistency, will prevent me from taking that part which present dangers and a new position of affairs may require. I am ready at any sacrifice to maintain the opinion which I now deliberately give, that there is upon the whole less of evil in making a decided effort to settle the Catholic question than in leaving it, as it has been left, an open question. Whenever it is once determined that an effort should be made by the Government to settle the Catholic question, there can be, I think, but one opinion—the settlement should, if possible, be a complete one."

The King was brought to consent to the measure only with the greatest difficulty, but he was really powerless to oppose the Premier and the Home Secretary, who, even with this measure, were much less distasteful to him than the Whigs. His Majesty consented, and then retracted; he yielded, and then refused; he wept with discreditable weakness at one time, and stormed with unusual excitement at another. To put an end to this painful and not very regal vacillation, the Ministers resolved to require

his written consent to their proceedings. This led to a discussion which lasted several hours, and was a protracted scene of pitiable weakness and supplication on the one side, and of unyielding firmness on the other. It is said that the King made several personal and rather reproachful appeals to Mr. Peel, which the latter answered more respectfully than affectionately. In the end, the King having, as he said, "nothing to fall back upon," gave the required consent in writing, adding, however, to the document very strong expressions of the pain and misery the proceedings gave him.

The consent of the King having been obtained, Peel expressed his readiness to commit himself to the support of a measure of ample concession and relief, but desired to give such support out of office. But the Duke of Wellington succeeded in convincing him that his assistance in office was indispensable. The King referred to his own scruples, to his uniform opposition to the measure in question, and said, "You advise this measure; you see no escape from it; you ask me to make the sacrifice of opinion and consistency—will you not make the same sacrifice?" Peel felt under these circumstances that he could return to his Sovereign no other answer than the one he did return, viz. that he *would* make that sacrifice, and would bear his full share of the responsibility and unpopularity attaching to the measure he advised.

Accordingly, the King's speech at the opening of Parliament in 1829, while asking for powers to put down the Catholic Association, intimated that attention would be called to the laws which imposed disabilities on his Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects, and that Parliament would be asked to consider whether the removal of those



disabilities could be effected consistently with the full and permanent security of the establishments in Church and State. On the 10th of February Mr. Peel introduced the Bill for the suppression of the Catholic Association, and in vindicating this measure adduced a considerable array of facts as to the condition of Ireland. These facts, he said, would lead them deliberately to consider, not merely whether additional powers were necessary for the executive Government, but whether there were not just and sufficient grounds for completely altering the position of the Roman Catholics in Ireland.

Even in this preliminary debate the taunts against Peel for his alleged inconsistency began. Replying to Mr. Banks on this head, the Minister appositely quoted in his own justification this passage from a speech made by Mr. Banks himself at a previous period: "Mr. Banks hoped it would never be a point of honour with any Government to persevere in measures after they were convinced of their impropriety. Political expediency was not at all times the same; what at one time might be considered consistent with sound policy, would at another be completely impolitic. Thus it was with respect to the Roman Catholics. What changes had not taken place in the question itself, as well as in the minds of the House, since it was last agitated!"

On the 12th of February Mr. Peel presented a petition from the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the University of Oxford, *against* the concession of the Catholic claims. The petition had been adopted in meeting assembled by 164 to 48, being a larger majority than was ever previously recorded. Peel, who felt that his position as member for the university was an anomalous one, had, in a letter addressed to the Vice-Chancellor, before the

assembling of Parliament, offered to resign his seat. The opponents of Catholic Emancipation prevailed, and accordingly on the 20th of February he formally resigned his seat. The loss of an honour which had been one of the dearest objects of his ambition could not but have affected him deeply ; yet this was only amongst the first exhibitions of that ostracism which fell upon him for his conduct in regard to the Catholic claims. Those who still rallied round him at Oxford proposed him again as their candidate, but he was defeated by Sir R. H. Inglis, a well-known ultra-Protestant champion. The numbers were—for Sir R. H. Inglis, 755 ; for Sir R. Peel, 609 ; majority for Inglis, 146. A few days afterwards the defeated Minister secured a seat at Westbury, Sir Manasseh Lopez having retired in his favour. During Peel's absence from the House of Commons his chief defenders were found upon the Whig benches. In the Lords, the Government policy at this time was attacked by a member of the royal family, the Duke of Cumberland, but warmly defended and supported by his Royal Highness's brother, the Duke of Clarence, afterwards William IV. The speech of the latter was lengthy, well argued, and distinguished for its cordial and liberal sentiments.

But the real battle was yet to be fought, and at one moment there was some apprehension lest Peel himself should not be able to bring forward his great measure in the House of Commons. In his Memoirs he observes that Sir Manasseh Lopez, who had given up his seat, as we have just seen, on his behalf, at Westbury, “suffered in his person from one of the many missiles with which the Town Hall was assailed during the ceremony of the election. It was fortunate for me that that ceremony

was not unduly protracted. Very shortly after my return had been declared by the proper officer, the arrival of a Protestant candidate in a chaise and four from London was announced. If he had entered the town a few hours earlier, it is highly probable that I should have fared no better at Westbury than I had done at Oxford."

Taking his seat on the 3rd of March, Peel announced that on the 5th he would bring forward the Catholic Relief Bill. But on the morning of the 4th he and the Duke of Wellington were summoned to Windsor to a conference with the King. Once more the measure was endangered. His Majesty retracted his consent to the Bill on the ground that it had been unwarily given, whereupon the Premier and Mr. Peel tendered their resignations. "At the close of the interview (which lasted for five hours) the King took leave of us"—we again quote Peel's *Memoirs*—"with great composure and great kindness, gave to each of us a salute on each cheek, and accepted our resignation of office, frequently expressing his sincere regret at the necessity which compelled us to retire from his service." For some hours the country was without a Government, but late in the evening of the same day the King wrote a letter to the Duke of Wellington informing him that his Majesty anticipated so much difficulty in the attempt to form another Administration that he could not dispense with the services of his late Ministry, that they must therefore withdraw their resignations, and that they were at liberty to proceed with the measures of which notice had been given in Parliament. Peel, feeling that after what had occurred the mere permission of his Majesty to proceed with the measures was not sufficient authority, suggested to the Duke of Wellington that a written authorization should be procured from the

King. This was done, and for the purpose of silencing all cavil on the subject, Mr. Peel, in opening his great speech the next day, began with these words: "I rise as a Minister of the King, and sustained by the just authority which belongs to that character, to vindicate the advice given to his Majesty by an united Cabinet."

The 5th of March, 1829, may justly be regarded as one of the most memorable days in the annals of the British Parliament. On that day was introduced a measure for the removal of a long-standing grievance and injustice, a measure which ranks amongst the greatest of legislative schemes. Hansard states that at ten o'clock in the morning of that day persons began to assemble in the avenues of the House of Commons; and although it was distinctly understood that Lord Chandos had declared his determination to persevere in his motion for calling over the House, and, consequently, that the gallery would not be opened until after six o'clock, visitors remained at their posts, and were gradually joined by others, until an immense crowd had collected. When the gallery was at length opened, which was at a few minutes past six, the rush was tremendous; in two minutes not a seat was unoccupied, and the doors and lobby were crowded with people anxious to avail themselves of any resignations that heat, pressure, and fatigue might occasion. One who was present states that the pressure was so severe that many persons were more or less injured. A passage for members was kept open with great difficulty; few of them were recognised, and owing to this fact the intention of a body of Irish law students to give a hearty greeting to Mr. Peel was defeated. Inside the House confusion was created by members hastening to their places, and by a rush of peers and

other privileged persons to obtain seats or standing room below the bar. Every eye was fixed on the hero of the occasion, who sat with folded arms and compressed lips, as though he had formed his resolution with pain, but was resolved to maintain it with inflexible determination.

After that portion of the King's speech relating to the affairs of Ireland had been read, Mr. Peel rose. He began his address by an adjuration to lay aside all prejudices and private interests, and confessed that he approached the subject almost overpowered by the magnitude of the questions it involved and the difficulties by which it was surrounded. Then, in language at once solemn and dignified, he said, "According to my heart and conscience I believe that the time is come when less danger is to be apprehended to the general interests of the empire, and to the spiritual and temporal welfare of the Protestant Establishment, in attempting to adjust the Catholic question than in allowing it to remain any longer in its present state. I have stated on a former occasion that such was my deliberate opinion, such the conclusion to which I felt myself compelled to come by the irresistible force of circumstances; and I will adhere to it, aye, and I will act upon it, unchanged by the scurrility of abuse, by the expression of opposite opinions, however vehement or however general—unchanged by the deprivation of political confidence or by the heavier sacrifice of private friendships and affections. Looking back upon the past, surveying the present, and prejudging the prospects of the future, again I declare that the time has at length arrived when this question must be adjusted." The Minister next addressed himself to prove, by a series of arguments, the two positions—that moral necessity existed



for concession, and that there was more danger in continued resistance than in concession accompanied with measures of restriction and precaution. He reviewed the history of the Catholic question, and the state of Ireland as connected with it, from the year 1794 down to the time at which he was speaking. The retrospect convinced him that so long as the question continued to be agitated, Ireland could not enjoy tranquillity nor the empire possess a stable Government. From facts adduced, he demonstrated the impossibility of forming an anti-concession Cabinet in the existing state of political parties in England, and in the condition of the elective franchise in Ireland. It had been said, Take away this franchise; but that could not be. "We cannot replace the Roman Catholics in the condition in which we found them when the system of relaxation and indulgence began. We have given them the means of acquiring education, wealth, and power. We have removed with our own hands the seal from a vessel in which a mighty spirit was enclosed; but it will not, like the genius in the fable, return within its narrow confines to gratify our curiosity and enable us to cast it back into the obscurity from which we evoked it. If we begin to recede, there is no limit we can assign to such recession; we shall occasion a violent reaction—violent in proportion to the hopes that have been frequently excited. It must be coerced by new rigours, provoking in their turn fresh resistance."

Such being the position of the question, Mr. Peel next argued that the only alternative remaining was that which Ministers proposed to take. As to the religious objections against the measure, he cited details to show that under the Penal Laws the principles of the Reformation

had made no progress in Ireland. The concessions he now proposed admitted the Catholics to Parliament and to the highest military and civil offices—except those connected with Church patronage, with education, and with the administration of the ecclesiastical law—on taking an oath described in the Act. The securities which he proposed, and which he regarded as necessary, were the regulation of the elective franchise in Ireland, a prohibition of attendance at Catholic places of worship in official robes, a restriction of episcopal titles to the Protestant hierarchy, and an efficient registration of members of the monastic orders, particularly the Jesuits. We had a clear right, he maintained, to take measures of security and precaution against the entrance of other members of these orders into the country, and against the extension of religious communities professing no allegiance to any authority in this country, and being under the control of foreign superiors, resident, it might be, at the Court of Rome. Then came the right hon. gentleman's very effective peroration. He admitted that, abstractedly, solid objections might be brought against every extensive and complicated measure, but the Catholic question could never be settled if every man were determined to settle it in his own way. Sacrifices had been made to the Roman Catholics, and he asked them to meet the measure in the same spirit, and with an anxious wish to allay every reasonable apprehension. He hoped that the civil contentions of Ireland would soon be at an end, and that mutual jealousies between the different classes of his Majesty's subjects might be removed. Perhaps he was not so sanguine as others in his expectations of the future, but he trusted that the adjustment of this question would give better and stronger securities to the Protestant in-

terest and the Protestant Establishment than any which the existing state of things admitted of. He had watched the progress of events, and had seen day by day disunion and hatred increasing, and the prospects of peace obscured by the gloomy advance of discontent and suspicion and distrust, creeping on step by step—to quote the words of Mr. Grattan—“like the mist at the heels of the countryman.” He (Mr. Peel) might have taken a more popular and a more selfish course. He might have held language much more acceptable to his friends and his late constituents. “But,” he continued, “in the course I have taken I have been mainly influenced by the anxious desire to provide for the maintenance of Protestant interests and for the security of Protestant Establishments. This is my defence—this my consolation—this shall be my revenge.”

“Sir”—and these were Mr. Peel’s eloquent concluding words—“I will hope for the best. God grant that the moral storm may be appeased, that the turbid waters of strife may be settled and composed, and that, having found their just level, they may be mingled, with equal flow, in one clear and common stream. But if these expectations are to be disappointed—if, unhappily, civil strife and contention shall survive the restoration of political privilege—if there be something inherent in the spirit of the Roman Catholic religion which disdains equality, and will be satisfied with nothing but ascendancy—still, I am content to run the hazard of the change. The contest, if inevitable, will be fought for other objects, and with other arms. The struggle will be, not for the abolition of civil distinctions, but for the predominance of an intolerant religion.

“Sir, I contemplate the progress of that struggle with

pain, but I look forward to its issue with perfect composure and confidence. We shall have dissolved the great moral alliance that has hitherto given strength to the cause of the Roman Catholics. We shall range on our side the illustrious authorities which have heretofore been enlisted upon theirs; the rallying cry of 'Civil Liberty' will then be all our own. We shall enter the field with the full assurance of victory, armed with the consciousness of having done justice and of being in the right, backed by the unanimous feeling of England, by the firm union of orthodoxy and dissent, by the applauding voice of Scotland, and, if other aid be requisite, cheered by the sympathies of every free state in either hemisphere, and by the wishes and the prayers of every free man, in whatever clime or under whatever form of government his lot may have been cast."

This speech, which took more than four hours in its delivery, occupies fifty-four columns in the Parliamentary Debates, and is the greatest oratorical effort associated with Peel's name. It was listened to with the most profound attention, and at times the cheers were so loud as to be heard in Westminster Hall and the passages leading to the lobby. At its close the applause was most enthusiastic and protracted, and a quarter of an hour elapsed before order could be restored. The measure was of course opposed; but in the end the motion was carried by 348 votes against 160, showing the immense majority of 188. In the list of the minority appeared the name of the Secretary's relative, Mr. Jonathan Peel.

On the second reading the Bill was opposed in an able speech by Mr. M. T. Sadler, Mr. Gladstone's predecessor at Newark, but it was defended in an equally able speech by Lord Palmerston. An incident which occasioned

great surprise was the opposition offered to the Bill by the Attorney-General, Sir Charles Wetherell. Peel himself was astonished at the vigour of his animosity, and the scene altogether has been described as one of a painful character. He said that he had declined to draw the Bill because it was subversive of the Protestant Church, which his Majesty was bound by his coronation oath to support. Sir Charles's attitude, gestures, and language were of the most violent character. In his reply, Peel placed the Attorney-General in an awkward position by showing that although he had frankly told the hon. and learned gentleman of these measures before they were introduced, he had not said one word at the time upon the matter. He (the Attorney-General) had supported the measure for the suppression of the Catholic Association, knowing that it was to be followed by this measure of relief. In closing his speech, Peel referred to the use which had been made of Canning's name in the debate, and he also alluded to those statesmen to whom the credit for Catholic Emancipation was really due. "The credit belongs to others, and not to me," he remarked. "It belongs to Mr. Fox, to Mr. Grattan, to Mr. Plunket, to the gentlemen opposite, and to an illustrious and right hon. friend of mine who is now no more. By their efforts, in spite of my opposition, it has proved victorious. I will not conceal from the House that in the course of this debate allusions have been made to the memory of my right hon. friend now no more (Mr. Canning) which have been most painful to my feelings. An hon. baronet has spoken of the cruel manner in which my right hon. friend was hunted down. Whether the hon. baronet was one of those who hunted him down I know not; but this I do know, that whoever did join in



the inhuman cry which was raised against him I was not one. I was on terms of the most friendly intimacy with my right hon. friend down even to the day of his death; and I say with as much sincerity of heart as man can speak, that I wish he was now alive to reap the harvest which he sowed, and to enjoy the triumph which his exertions gained. I would say of him as he said of the late Mr. Perceval, 'Would he were here to enjoy the fruits of his victory!'

The second reading was carried by nearly as large a majority as the first, and the Opposition, seeing that nothing could be done against the Bill in the Lower House, fixed their hopes upon the Upper. Although the King behaved most ungenerously to Peel at this time, the Duke of Wellington worked loyally and faithfully with his colleague. After the speech of Sir Charles Wetherell, his Grace intimated to the Attorney-General that his Majesty had no further need of his services. On the third reading of the Bill Sir C. Wetherell revenged himself by a bitter attack upon Peel, to which the latter retorted with spirit, and in replying on the whole question, to another hon. member, at the close of his remarks, he said, "I will tell the hon. member, to use the metaphor of the gallant admiral near him, that it does not always follow that the pilot is bound to steer the same course to guard the ship from danger; but when different winds are blowing, it is absolutely incumbent to take a different course, to save the ship from those dangers which, if they were incurred, must lead to the inevitable loss not only of the ship but also of her crew. That has been the opinion of all former statesmen, at all times, and in all countries." A good deal of acrimony was shown by various speakers during

the debate, but at one point the whole House roared with laughter at an amusing but intentional blunder made by Sir Joseph Yorke. "Mr. Speaker," said the hon. member, "I hope I may conclude the discussion on this Bill with a Parliamentary toast: May the *sister* kingdoms be united, and may they live hereafter like two *brothers*!" The majority on the third reading was 178, or only ten votes smaller than that on the first, thus showing the great and compact support extended to the Ministry on this measure. The Bill for the disqualification of the Irish forty-shilling freeholders, which was a distinct measure from the emancipatory one, was proceeded with *bari passu*.

On the 31st of March the Relief Bill was read a first time in the House of Lords, the second reading being fixed for the 2nd of April. Mr. Peel was present at the greater part of this debate, leaning on the bar and exhibiting a placid, impassive countenance, which never changed amid the whispered reproaches designed to meet his ear. For some unknown reason he was far more unpopular with the opponents of the Catholics in the Upper House than any of his colleagues; and whenever a charge of treachery and inconsistency was levelled against the supporters of the measure, the eyes of the speaker and of those who concurred with him were turned on Peel, if he happened to be present. The glances would have been just as effective if directed against a statue. The Duke of Wellington moved the second reading of the bill, and at the close of his speech the Primate of all England, Dr. Howley, moved its rejection, the amendment being seconded by the Primate of Ireland, Dr. Beresford. The latter spoke with considerable effect, but his speech was answered by the Bishop of

Oxford, Dr. Lloyd, the only prelate who rose in defence of the ministerial policy. Dr. Lloyd was the friend and adviser of Peel at this period. The Duke of Sussex spoke in favour of the Bill, as did Lord Lyndhurst, one of the most effective parliamentary orators of his day. Two of the ablest speeches in the debate came subsequently from Lords Grey and Plunket. The division was taken shortly after one o'clock on Sunday morning, when there appeared—for the measure, 147; against it, 79; majority, as regards peers present, 68. But there were also 70 proxies in favour of the Bill, and but 33 against, leaving a majority of 37 on the proxies, or a total majority of 105 in favour of the Bill. The majority being considerably larger than was expected, the safety of the Bill was assured. The measure soon passed through its remaining stages, the third reading being taken on the 10th of April, when the total majority in its favour was 104, or only one vote less than on the second reading. The King, who had vacillated on this subject to the last, gave his assent to the Bill on the 13th by Royal Commission, and the religious disabilities of the Roman Catholics disappeared from the Statute Book.

The conduct of Peel on this great question has been variously viewed, and it will perhaps be advantageous here to quote the opinions of several distinguished men, as well as Peel's own apology for the course he then took. His relative, Sir L. Peel, observes that by his policy on Catholic Emancipation "he won the calm and lasting approval of all conscientious and wise men, who, expecting no infallibility, and indeed rarely any superior intelligence in public men, delight to find in them an absence of all self-seeking and a patriotic superiority to

mere party obligations. The moral qualities which he displayed in this painful struggle were of the highest order. It is curious and instructive to trace his internal struggles, the conflict between a false and a true allegiance, and the slow, final triumph of the higher duty. He maintained throughout, midst many provocations, taunts the most bitter, and invective the most fierce, a full and perfect command over a temper naturally quick and impatient of opposition. He showed an astonishing dexterity in meeting and answering objections, and an eloquence suited to the high occasion on which it was exercised." He took his course knowing also the sorrow it must cause to a beloved and revered parent. "Yet he wished in some manner to avoid this cup of bitterness. Was there no way left of escaping from this pillory? Could he not resign? Might he not support the Bill as a private member of the House? Might he not thus do the cause more service? These were not palterings with duty; they were the wary approaches to its highest duty of a cautious and circumspect mind. Not plunging with the spirit of a self-immolating votary, afraid to think, impelled, and rushing with a mad delight upon ruin; his was the calm, steady, and deliberate advance to self-sacrifice of the trained soldier of duty." M. Guizot remarks that when Peel changed his opinion and his policy he was perfectly sincere: "He merely obeyed what he considered to be the truth, and his only object was the public good. He might, without injustice, be taxed with want of foresight; and the secret desire to accomplish those great reforms which he believed to be just and necessary rendered him, perhaps, too ready to break party ties, and prevented him from seeing all the inconveniences of so doing; but when he himself meets

these accusations half way who would lay them rigorously to his charge?" It is a curious fact that during the session in which Peel first entered Parliament, his father urged upon Lord Liverpool the necessity for binding him to the Conservative cause, as at bottom his tendencies were Whig, so that his leaning at various points in his life to progressive measures is not to be wondered at.

Returning to the question of Catholic Emancipation, the eulogium passed upon Peel by Sir James Graham, a political opponent, may be cited as faithfully representing the public sentiment. "Considering the sacrifices which he has recently made," said the hon. baronet, "the connections from which he has torn himself, the public attachments which he has broken asunder, the dangers which he might have created by an opposite course, the difficulties which he might have created by adhering to an opposite system, the civil war which he has avoided by departing from it, and the great service which he has rendered to the State by the manly avowal of a change of opinion: considering all the circumstances, I think the right hon. gentleman entitled to the highest praise, and to the honest respect of every friend of the Catholics." Lord Dalling and Bulwer, many years later, used language similar to this. "There can be little doubt," he remarks, "that he (Peel) had prevented a civil war in which many of the most eminent statesmen in England, and all the eminent statesmen of foreign countries, would have considered that the Irish Catholics were in the right. At the same time he did not derive from the course he had taken the hope which many entertained—that all Irish feuds would henceforth cease, and that it would become easy to establish in Ireland the satisfaction and tranquillity that were found



in other parts of our empire. He did, however, deem that if the great and crying cause of grievance which had so long agitated and divided the public mind were once removed there would be no powerful rallying cry for the disaffected, and that in any dangerous crisis the Government would find all reasonable men in Ireland and all men in England by its side."

The *Westminster Review*—and we may select this organ as representing the opinions of an enlightened press—thus distinguished, many years after the passing of the Catholic Relief Bill, the merits of Peel's policy at this important crisis: "The safety of the country required that Catholic Emancipation should be at once conceded—of this there was no doubt. The Whigs, no doubt, ought to have carried it, but the King, it was well known, would not endure a Whig Ministry, and the King was impracticable, testy, and prevaricating, and manageable by no one but the Duke. If the Duke had resigned he would have thrown himself into the hands of the old Tories, Emancipation would have been refused, and civil war and national retrogression and disgrace would have been the consequence. But the Duke's resignation would have been necessitated by Peel's retirement. As an honest and disinterested patriot, therefore, Sir Robert Peel, in our judgment, had no option but to act as he did act."

This extract well represents the question from the point of view of practical politics and statesmanship. With regard to the personal aspect of the matter, we will quote Sir Robert Peel's defence as given in his posthumous Memoirs. After observing that he might have sheltered himself under the dishonest plea of a false consistency, and that if he had been stimulated by personal ambition he might have encouraged and deferred to the scruples of

the Sovereign, and have appealed to the religious feelings of the country to rally round the Throne, he says in language which must be convincing in its emphasis, "From the imputation of other motives still more unworthy, the documents I now produce will, I trust, suffice to protect my memory. I can with truth affirm, as I do solemnly affirm, in the presence of Almighty God, 'to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid,' that in advising and promoting the measures of 1829 I was swayed by no fear except the fear of public calamity, and that I acted throughout on a deep conviction that those measures were not only conducive to the general welfare, but that they had become imperatively necessary in order to avert from interests which had a special claim upon my support—the interests of the Church, and of institutions connected with the Church—an imminent and increasing danger. It may be that I was unconsciously influenced by motives less perfectly pure and disinterested—by the secret satisfaction of being—

' . . . When the waves went high,  
A daring pilot in extremity.'

But at any rate it was no ignoble ambition which prompted me to bear the brunt of a desperate conflict, and at the same time to submit to the sacrifice of everything dear to a public man, excepting the approval of his own conscience and the hope of ultimate justice."

Posterity, however, will concern itself less with the private question than with the infinitely more important fact, that at a moment of peril to the nation Peel stepped into the breach and carried his great measure of pacification. A struggle of three centuries was settled by his

bold and decisive action, and the two sections of the King's subjects which had hitherto been at variance and strife now met at Westminster under equal parliamentary privileges. Whatever a man may be as regards the complexion of his individual politics, if he removes a gigantic civil or religious grievance he is, on account of that act at least, entitled to everlasting remembrance.

## CHAPTER V.

### FALL OF THE WELLINGTON-PEEL MINISTRY.

THE Duke of Wellington's Government found itself in no enviable position after the concession of Catholic Emancipation. That measure estranged from it the sympathies of many members of the old Tory party, while the Iron Duke distrusted and disliked such support as he received from the Whigs. With the exception of its two leading spirits, moreover, the Cabinet itself was not strong enough to inspire confidence. Peel now found himself somewhat critically placed: regarded as he was by the King with an aversion which his Majesty did not attempt to conceal, and separated by recent events from many of his life-long friends, the situation naturally caused him great anxiety. Complete union with the moderate Whigs was impossible, and, driven to strike out new lines of action, Peel set himself to strengthen his position by supplementing his Catholic measures with domestic reforms.

A Select Committee (the sixth of its kind) having reported that without some change in the effete and worn-out watch system, life or property could not be deemed secure in the metropolis, the Home Secretary introduced on the 15th of April the Bill referred to in a

preceding chapter for the establishment of a Metropolitan Police Force. This measure was of a very valuable and beneficent kind, and yet, although it passed through the House of Commons with scarcely any opposition, it excited great hostility out of doors. It interfered with supposed parochial interests, and the press and a considerable section of the people opposed it in consequence ; but within a very short time after the Act came into operation its beneficial and statesmanlike character needed no defence.

The distressed condition of the silk-weavers and the manufacturing classes generally led to a good deal of discussion in Parliament ; and when a government, whether rightly or wrongly, does not move vigorously in such a crisis, some portion of obloquy is sure to attach to it. Incidentally, too, the question of reform was raised in this session, in relation to the disfranchisement of East Retford. It was proposed by the reformers that the representation should be transferred to some large town, but Peel supported the proposal that it should be extended to the neighbouring hundred of Bassetlaw. When the establishment of a system of Poor Laws in Ireland was mooted, Peel said that the incursions of Irish paupers into England was undoubtedly a great inconvenience and hardship upon the people of this country ; and its direct tendency was to reduce the labourers of the country, wherever such incursions took place, as in the West of England, to a level with the paupers from Ireland. At the same time he would not pledge himself to introduce the principle of the English system of Poor Laws into Ireland, without having first given the subject the most deliberate consideration as to its effect on the state of pauperism in this country, and as to its probable



result in giving poor but able-bodied men in that country the right to demand assistance.

But the most conspicuous incident of the session, and one far-reaching in its effects, was one closely connected with the question of Catholic Emancipation. Mr. O'Connell having been elected for Clare, his right to sit gave rise to lengthy debates and a scene in Parliament. The law permitted the election of a Catholic, but he could not sit without taking an oath subversive of his own faith. The Emancipation Act relieved Catholic members who should be elected after the passing of the Act from taking this oath, but O'Connell having been elected before the Bill was carried, was excluded from the operation of the Act. On the 15th of May O'Connell appeared at the table of the House of Commons, supported by Lords Duncannon and Ebrington. The old oath was produced, but O'Connell declined to take it, and the Speaker having decided that he could not sit without taking it, the hon. member withdrew. Brougham thereupon moved that O'Connell be called back and heard at the table in support of his claim to sit on taking the oath prescribed in the new Act. Peel and others held that he should be heard at the bar and not at the table; and accordingly on the 18th instant, the day to which the debate had been adjourned, Peel moved that "the member for Clare be heard at the bar, by himself, his counsel, or agents, in respect of his claim to sit and vote in Parliament, without taking the oath of supremacy." The mover pointed out that the law subjected individuals who sat, or voted, or entered into the House, not having taken the oath of supremacy, to heavy penalties; and therefore, even if there were considerable doubt on the subject, the House ought not to lend its sanction to

the possible infraction of the law. The hon. member's purpose would be answered by hearing him at the bar, and in reference to his own security it was better that he should be thus heard than at the table. The motion having been put, O'Connell was called in, when he spoke forcibly in support of his claim. In the discussion which ensued, Peel held that O'Connell was not entitled to the benefit of the Emancipation Act, and that his election must be declared void. The question must be dealt with judicially, he said, and decided according to privilege of Parliament, without reference to extrinsic circumstances. Mr. O'Connell was not deprived of any civil right whatever, but he had claimed a right to sit as member of Parliament under the old law, and by the operation of that law he was excluded. In the end a new writ was issued, and O'Connell was put to the trouble of a new election. The episode, however, did harm to the Ministry amongst those who were conciliated by its previous policy.

This question was followed by a debate on Parliamentary Reform, initiated by the Marquis of Blandford. His lordship moved a series of resolutions to the effect that there existed a number of boroughs the representation of which could be purchased, and others in which the number of electors was so small as to render them liable to the influence of bribery ; and that such a system was disgraceful to the character of the House of Commons, destructive of the confidence which the people should repose in it, and prejudicial to the best interests of the country. Peel dashed the hopes of the reformers by opposing the resolutions, remarking that if the House was prepared to affirm the abstract principles of resolutions like these, it ought to follow them up by some practical measure. That was impossible at such a late period of the session.

But, in the second place, he was not prepared to affirm the truth of the charges made against the close boroughs. And again, if the system of close boroughs had contributed to the triumph of the great principles of freedom of trade and Catholic Emancipation, as claimed, such a system should rather be preserved than sacrificed. The resolutions were rejected by a majority of 401 to 118.

Peel on two occasions during this session defended his currency legislation, with respect to which the country generally was in accord with him. In answer to Mr. Attwood, he announced that he would never consent to a revision or alteration of the existing currency of the country, and adduced facts relating to the trade of the country which supported him in his resolution. The distress which existed was attributable to quite other causes than the nature of the currency.

A question which now arose in connection with our foreign policy did much to discredit the Government with the country. The crown of Portugal had been usurped by Don Miguel, and England—a power which had been most friendly to the dispossessed Sovereign, Donna Maria—looked on. Nevertheless, we still gave Donna Maria her title. An expedition, consisting chiefly of Portuguese subjects, embarked from Portsmouth for the island of Terceira, which still acknowledged Donna Maria as the lawful sovereign. The expedition was stopped, however, by a British naval force, on the ground that although ostensibly bound for Terceira, it was really going to Portugal, to be employed against Don Miguel. But as no conclusive proof was given of this latter intention, much discussion ensued upon the points of international law involved. The opinion gained ground that the Duke of Wellington was favouring the cause of the

usurping and absolutist Sovereign in order "to satisfy the great potentates of the continent, who were adverse to freedom." Sir James Mackintosh brought up the subject in the House of Commons, representing our act as one of hostility against the rightful Sovereign of Portugal, and in favour of the usurper. Peel defended the Government, and reviewed the whole circumstances of the case and the recent history of Portugal. The expedition, he affirmed, was clearly designed to act hostilely against Don Miguel, with whom England was not at war, for we still had a consul in Portugal. He was satisfied that the character of England had been vindicated by not allowing its ports to be made subservient to such designs. The debate ended without a division, Ministers promising to produce papers; but the effect was to excite a feeling of dissatisfaction in some quarters with regard to the foreign policy of England. The Government also lost *prestige* over the appointment of Prince Polignac as Prime Minister to Charles X. of France. The King was exceedingly bigoted himself, while the Prince was ultra-Royalist, the close friend of the Jesuits, and an enemy to the press. The Duke of Wellington was supposed to be privy to his appointment, or to have had some share in it, and a distrustful feeling arose in England in consequence.

To add to these foreign sources of ministerial unpopularity, the affairs of Ireland were once more the cause of great solicitude. O'Connell, enraged at the proceedings in the House, and detaching himself from those of his own party who were inclined to take from him the credit of emancipation, began a career of agitation in Ireland. Risings and outrages also, though unconnected with the member for Clare, became the order of the day. At this

time the *Morning Journal* was severely attacking the Ministry on its Catholic policy, and the law was put in force against the editor and proprietors of the journal. Convictions were obtained, and sentences passed upon the defendants which were regarded as unusually severe. Moreover, early in the session of 1830, damaging attacks were made upon the administrative capacity of the Duke of Wellington and other members of the Ministry. Lord Ellenborough occasioned grave dissatisfaction by his policy on Indian affairs, and Mr. Peel proposed, in accordance with a pledge given the previous session, a Committee of Inquiry for the purpose of investigating the state of the commerce between this country and our Indian possessions. His speech was marked by considerable liberality of feeling towards the natives. The Committee was appointed, and sat to the end of the session.

Animated debates arose on the question of a reduction of taxation, and on one occasion Sir James Graham strongly attacked the Duke of Wellington. Peel replied, and said, "We will propose such measures of retrenchment as can be effected with advantage, but will propose none which cannot be maintained consistently with the honour and just influence of this nation; and I say with confidence, but perfect respect, that whatever may be the consequences of the combination of parties in this House, there is a sufficient fund of good sense prevailing in the country, without reference to ultra-Whig or ultra-Tory, which will ultimately sanction and confirm the course that has been pursued, and which it is our intention to pursue." That the intention of the Government in regard to retrenchment was honest, is proved from the fact that the budget of this year showed a reduction of taxes to the amount of £3,425,000. They



successfully carried their financial measures in the House, and yet in regard to this matter of expenditure they incurred unpopularity in the country. When O'Connell presented a petition from Dublin in favour of the repeal of the Union, Sir Charles Wetherell objected to the reception of the petition; but Peel, while he acknowledged that he could not too strongly express his abhorrence of its prayer and its object, said he perceived no reason for refusing to receive the petition—thus affording another proof of his desire to be guided by constitutional principles. Ministers were defeated this session on a matter involving two small superannuation allowances, and this involved a further loss of prestige. Something was done in the course of the session, at the instigation of Peel, to mitigate the severity of the penal code as regarded cases of forgery, but the Government were not able to upset the growing feeling against them. Its foreign policy generally was regarded as weak and vacillating, and only upon such portion of that policy as affected Mexico did the Ministry rise to the nation's conception of a spirited policy. Peel was on this occasion the expounder of the course of the Government.

The end of the Administration was drawing near. George IV., who had been seriously indisposed for months, and on whose behalf Peel piloted through Parliament a Bill allowing the sign-manual to be adhibited by a stamp, died somewhat suddenly on Saturday, the 26th of June. This selfish and sensual monarch was not without certain accomplishments and business qualities, but his death excited no feelings of poignant regret amongst his subjects. His successor, William IV., was, on the contrary, exceedingly popular, liberal in many respects, honest, good-natured, and impartial. A warm

debate arose over the King's first message. Brougham, after comparing the Duke of Wellington to Prince Polignac, said, "I can perceive in this country, as in that, that the day of force is over, and that the Minister who hopes to rule by an appeal to royal favour or military power may be overwhelmed, though I in nowise accuse him of such an attempt. Him I accuse not. It is you I accuse—his flatterers, his mean, fawning parasites." Peel rose, and in indignant tones demanded whether the speaker presumed to call him the mean and fawning parasite of anybody? Brougham professed to feel annoyance at such an interpretation of his words, and the incident ended.

Parliament was dissolved in July, and in the same month a revolution occurred in Paris, followed by another in Belgium. O'Connell at once commenced an agitation for the repeal of the Union in Ireland, but in England the elections passed off peaceably. The unjust charge against the Duke of Wellington, however, of having given his countenance to the reactionary measures of the Polignac Ministry, was revived and strengthened, and it operated injuriously against the Government. When Parliament assembled in November the unwisdom of Ministers was again demonstrated. Instead of considering in some way whether a measure of Reform might not be granted in response to the great and growing demand upon this subject, the Duke of Wellington made an express declaration to the effect that he should oppose any measure for reform which might be brought forward, that no such measure should be proposed by the Government so long as he held his present position, and that the legislature could not be improved. This announcement immediately strengthened the feeling against the Government. In the Commons, Peel ener-

getically denounced the renewal of agitation in Ireland. Lord Althorp, the Whig leader, said he would support any measure the tendency of which would be to dispossess Ministers of their places. The King promised to attend the usual Lord Mayor's banquet on the 9th of November, but on the 8th a proclamation appeared to the effect that not only had his Majesty's intended visit on the following day been postponed, but that neither the Lord Mayor's procession nor the dinner would take place. Letters had been received by the Duke of Wellington stating that a riot was to be apprehended if the King made his appearance in the City, and in one of these letters, written by the Lord Mayor elect, it was suggested that he should come "strongly and sufficiently guarded." Hereupon the Duke advised that the King's visit should be postponed. Debates arose in both Houses as to the postponement of the visit, which had caused a great depression in the funds, and the incident greatly aggravated the unpopularity of the Ministry. The Duke of Wellington, however, as later records showed, was fully impressed that he had taken the right course in the matter. Peel also adduced evidence in the Commons to prove that Ministers acted wisely and judiciously under the circumstances.

The fall of the Government was at last occasioned by a trivial matter. The Chancellor of the Exchequer having introduced a plan for the settlement of the Civil List in the new reign, Sir Henry Parnell, on the ground of want of confidence in the Ministry, moved for a Special Committee of Inquiry. The Government were beaten by a majority of 29, in a House composed of 437 members. This issue was a surprise to both parties. On the following day,

November 16th, Peel announced that he and his colleagues had tendered their resignations to the King, and that his Majesty had accepted them. Under these circumstances Lord Althorp pressed Mr. Brougham to postpone the motion he intended to bring forward upon Parliamentary Reform, and the latter reluctantly consented to do so. The Wellington Administration, which had lost the confidence of the country chiefly through the impracticability of its chief, thus came to an end.

At this point it may be mentioned that on the 3rd of May, 1830, Peel succeeded his father in the dignity of a baronet, and also in the Parliamentary representation of Tamworth, for which borough he continued to sit until his decease, twenty years later. On the 8th of June, 1820, the subject of our biography was married to Julia, daughter of General Sir John Floyd, Bart., and by this lady, who survived him, he had issue five sons and two daughters.

## CHAPTER VI.

### PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

THEIR defeat on the Civil List was the ostensible reason for the resignation of the Wellington Administration, but it was well known that the pressing nature of the Reform question had much to do with their retirement from office. Earl Grey was sent for, and in a few days succeeded in forming a Ministry, but upon the understanding that Parliamentary Reform should be made a ministerial measure. Any hope, therefore, which might have been formed of a coalition with Peel was annihilated, that statesman being strongly opposed to reform. Brougham of course now became Lord Chancellor. Peel was now in political adversity, with abundant opportunity for reviewing the past and shaping his course in the future. One who was returned to this Parliament with him, and who listened to his speeches, thus describes him from the oratorical point of view : " Addressing the House several times in the night on various subjects, he always seemed to know more than any one else knew about each of them, and to convey to you the idea that he thought he did so. His language was not usually striking, but it was always singularly correct, and gathered force with the development of his argument. He never seemed occu-



pied with himself. His effort was evidently directed to convince you, not that he was *eloquent*, but that he was *right*. When the subject suited it he would be witty, and with a look and a few words he could most effectively convey contempt; he could reply also with great spirit to an attack, but he was rarely aggressive. He seemed rather to aim at gaining the doubtful than mortifying or crushing the hostile. His great rivals, Canning and Brougham, being removed, he no doubt felt more at his ease than formerly; and though there was nothing like assumption or pretension in his manner, there was a tone of superiority, which he justified by a great store of knowledge, a clear and impressive style, and a constant readiness to discuss any question that arose." The same writer further observes that Sir Robert Peel at this time gave one "the idea of a great, prudent, wary leader who was fighting after a plan, and keeping his eye during the whole of the battle directed to the result." Without being superior to several of his competitors as a man, "he was far superior to all as a member of Parliament; and his ascendancy was the more visible as the whole strength of his party was in him."

The Whigs being now in office, their Reform Bill was prepared, and introduced into the House of Commons on the 1st of March, 1831, by Lord John Russell. The scheme, which was regarded as very sweeping even by some of the reformers themselves, proposed the total disfranchisement of sixty boroughs in each of which the population did not amount to two thousand, and the partial disfranchisement of forty-seven where the population was only four thousand. Out of the seats thus gained the number of county members was to be increased, and representatives were to be given to certain large towns

not heretofore represented. It is said that "the Government plan was received with profound astonishment, and Lord John continued his explanations of it amid cheers and laughter." Amongst a mass of deprecatory speeches, Mr. Macaulay spoke eloquently in favour of the measure. On the third night of the debate Lord Palmerston vindicated his support of reform, and then there were loud cries for Peel. He rose with diffidence, and after replying to Palmerston, and glancing at the condition of France, he said: "It was the duty of the King's Government to abstain from agitating this question at such a period as the present—to abstain from the incitement throughout this land to that conflict (God grant it may be only a moral conflict!) which must arise between the possessors of existing privileges and those to whom they are to be transferred. It is the duty of the Government to calm, not to stimulate, the fever of popular excitement. They have adopted a different course, they have sent through the land the firebrand of agitation, and no one can now recall it."

It was believed that a division taken upon the first reading would have resulted in a defeat of Ministers, but in such an event Sir Robert Peel was neither prepared at the moment with a policy or a party. He therefore recommended that the division should be taken upon the second reading. The first reading was then taken unchallenged, and when the second came on the Government only carried the Bill by a majority of one, the numbers being 302 to 301. The Tory party now made the mistake of not confiding its conduct upon this occasion to Sir Robert Peel, and on the order for committing the Bill put up General Gascoyne to move its rejection. Their most advantageous course, as a party,

would have been to discuss the Bill in committee, and endeavour to amend it by minimising its effects; then they would not have appeared as being totally opposed to reform. Peel, however, supported Gascoyne's motion, throwing the blame by anticipation upon the Government, should their measure be rejected. This event occurred. There appeared for the amendment 299, against 291—the Ministry being thus in a minority of eight.

The Bill being lost, great excitement ensued. What course would Ministers adopt? Four days later, that is on the 22nd of April, an extraordinary scene of disorder was witnessed in the House of Commons. The Speaker appeared in his official robes, and members knew at once that Parliament was about to be dissolved. Confusion reigned in the House, and many gentlemen rose to their feet at the same time, amongst them being Sir Robert Peel, Lord Althorp, and Sir F. Burdett. Not a word could be heard, but the Speaker called on Peel, who attempted to proceed amidst cheers from his own side and derisive shouts from the ministerial benches. When some amount of order was restored, the right hon. gentleman said: "The House has this day seen an example of a defiance of all regular authority, even from the place occupied by Ministers of the Crown. I do not complain of the dissolution of this House, I complain merely of the manner in which it was done." He proceeded to say that if this was a foretaste of what was to take place hereafter, he called on them to beware of a reformed Parliament.

The excitement under which Peel manifestly laboured betrayed itself in his next utterances: "I will tell you what you are about to establish by a reformed Parliament. If the Bill proposed by Ministers be carried, it will introduce the very worst and vilest

species of despotism—the despotism of demagogues; the despotism of journalism; that despotism which has brought neighbouring countries, once happy and flourishing, to the very brink of ruin and despair.” He then attacked the Government, alleging that they had come to a resolution to dissolve Parliament in order that they might protect themselves from that loss of power with which they were threatened. “They have been in office for some months, and not a single measure has emanated from them, from the day they took office till this moment, for the benefit of the country. They have pursued the course adopted by all governments called Liberal. They have tossed on the table of this House some Bills—a Game Bill and an Emigration Bill—and after having established with respect to them and other measures what they call Liberal principles, they abandon them to their fate.” Peel was interrupted in his next sentence by loud cries of “order” and “bar,” but he vainly endeavoured to proceed, until the Usher of the Black Rod appeared, and the Speaker and the members were summoned to the Upper House to hear the King’s speech on the prorogation of Parliament. A strange scene was also witnessed in the Lords before the arrival of his Majesty. The Lord Chancellor (Brougham) having gone to meet the King, the Earl of Shaftesbury was voted to the woolsack. His lordship proceeded to take his seat in the midst of an indescribable hubbub, and it is recorded that the peeresses present were terribly alarmed, while peers shook their fists in each other’s faces, and it seemed not unlikely that more than one personal scuffle was imminent. At last the King appeared. Having read his speech, Parliament was dissolved, and on the following day new writs were issued, returnable on the 14th of June.

The dissolution was hailed with delight in London ; but the excited feelings of the people unfortunately led to scenes of violence in the metropolis and the provinces. The residences of the Duke of Wellington and other opponents of reform were attacked. Meantime the elections proceeded, and it was speedily seen that Ministers would return to Parliament with their forces greatly strengthened. London and other cities and towns pronounced decidedly in favour of the Government, while as regards the English counties not ten members were returned holding anti-Reform opinions.

Parliament was opened on the 21st of June, and the great question was immediately brought forward. Peel spoke guardedly and with studied moderation, and the first reading of the Reform Bill was taken without opposition. On the 4th of July the debate on the second reading began. Mr. Macaulay, in his powerful speech on behalf of the measure, said, "Nothing can prevent the passing of this noble law—this second Bill of Rights. I do call it the second Bill of Rights, and so will the country call it, and so will our children. I will call it the 'Greater Charter' of the liberties of England." In his address, which was loudly called for, Peel said that he was swayed by no motives of self-intérest to take his present course ; he had no borough to protect, he had contracted no obligation to those who possessed that influence which the present measure was intended to destroy, and he was about to resist the wishes of a great and overpowering majority, backed by the support of an united Government, and acting in conformity with the supposed opinions and wishes of the King. He observed that he had been uniformly opposed to reform upon principle, because he was unwilling to open a door which



he saw no prospect of being able to close. He had opposed the giving representatives to Manchester and other large towns, because he thought the advantage of such a measure not sufficient to counterbalance the evil of altering the constitution of Parliament and agitating the public mind on the question of Reform. Further, he did not admit that the opinion of the country was fixed and permanently decided in favour of this Bill. Peel seems to have been firmly convinced at this time that the excitement on the question would pass away. Towards the close of his arguments he again called in question the mode in which the prerogative of the Crown had been used to dissolve Parliament, and in finally defending his own conduct, said, "For my own part, not seeing the necessity for this reform, doubting much whether the demand for reform is so urgent, and doubting still more whether, if carried, this measure can be a permanent one, I give my conscientious opposition to this Bill. In doing this I feel the more confident because the Bill does not fulfil the conditions recommended from the Throne, because it is not founded on the acknowledged principles of the constitution, because it does not give security to the acknowledged prerogatives of the Crown, because it does not guarantee the legitimate rights, influences, and privileges of both Houses of Parliament, because it is not calculated to render secure and permanent the happiness and prosperity of the people, and, above all, because it subverts a system of government which has combined security to personal liberty and protection to property with vigour in the executive power of the State in a more perfect degree than ever existed in any age or in any other country in the world." The Tories, nevertheless, were fully con-

scious that the country was against them on this great question, and that they were fighting a losing battle. When the division came the majority for Government was larger than had been anticipated. There appeared—for the second reading, 367 ; against, 231 ; majority 136. The House altogether thus numbered nearly six hundred members.

The Bill was warmly contested in Committee, and the third reading was carried by a majority of 55 in a small House, the division not being expected. But upon the question "that the Bill do pass," Sir Robert Peel once more spoke against it. He did this from a sense of duty, he remarked, and because he did not think the measure would conduce to the permanent interests of the country. On that ground he felt bound to oppose the wishes of the people. "I cheerfully submit to pay the penalty to which that difference of opinion subjects me. With reluctance I surrender the hold which I may have on the people's esteem. That is a penalty which they have a right to inflict, but they have no right or power to compel me to acquiesce in their error; for I believe them to be in error. I will not involve myself in the responsibility of the measure ; and being, with others, a life-renter only in the admirable constitution which has hitherto secured the peace and happiness of my country, I will not be instrumental in cutting off the inheritance of those who are to succeed me." The Bill passed the House of Commons by a majority of 109, the numbers being—ayes, 345 ; noes, 236. It was read a first time in the Lords on the 22nd of September, but after a debate on the second reading some days afterwards was thrown out by a majority of 41. Upon this adverse vote the House of Commons passed a resolution of confidence in the

Ministry, regretting also that the Lords should have thrown out the Bill. Parliament was prorogued, but with an intimation that the subject would be again brought forward in the ensuing session. Agitation was now renewed in the country, and riots occurred in several towns, notably Nottingham, Derby, and Bristol. The last-named place was sacked by a violent mob and partly burned. Very serious loss of life also took place.

Parliament met on the 6th of December. It was opened by the King in person, and the speech set forth that a speedy and satisfactory settlement of the Reform question became daily of more pressing importance to the security of the State and the contentment and welfare of the people. During the debate on the Address, Sir Robert Peel denied the charge that the unsatisfactory condition of the country was due to the opponents of Reform; he threw the responsibility for this upon the measures of the Government, for they could not shake the foundations of the ancient institutions of a country without producing discontent which would long survive the introduction of the measure that gave it existence. Warming in his speech, Peel denounced what he described as the tyranny of the reformers in regard to freedom of opinion and the persecution of members of the House of Lords. "What system of Government can that be," he asked in conclusion, "in which you deny to your opponents the free exercise of judgment and of speech? You cannot propose changes as extensive as those of your Reform Bill without expecting, if you are reasonable men, that they will encounter opposition. You may denounce that opposition; you may visit it with confiscation, exile, and death; but so long as honour and courage exist among men—and in English bosoms I

trust these will find an eternal spring—you will not, you cannot, deter us from the expression of our honest opinions." Peel looked with genuine, not simulated, apprehension to a reformed House of Commons, but such a termination to the struggle was now inevitable. The people had raised the cry of "The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill!" and the Tories were powerless to make headway against the current of public opinion. In the debate on the second reading Peel reiterated his objections to the Bill, giving parenthetically an account of the reasons which led him to introduce the Catholic Emancipation Bill, his policy in that matter having been arraigned. On the question of Reform, he said that though his opposition would be unavailing it would not be fruitless, because the opposition now made would oppose a bar to further concessions hereafter. He sincerely believed that the proposed changes would prove ultimately destructive of all those usages and practices which had ensured to England a large share of peace and prosperity, and which had made and preserved her the proudest kingdom in the annals of the world.

The second reading was carried by 324 to 162. The House then adjourned for the Christmas holidays, and did not reassemble until the 17th of January. The discussions in Committee were so protracted that it was not until the 23rd of March that the measure passed the Commons by a majority of 116. The Bill went up to the Lords, and the second reading was carried after a debate of four days by a majority of 9. Seventeen peers who voted against Reform in 1831 supported it in 1832. In Committee, however, upon a motion of Lord Lyndhurst's, Ministers found themselves in a minority of 35.

Earl Grey and Lord Brougham went down to Windsor, and offered the King the alternative of creating new peers or accepting the resignation of Ministers. The King chose the latter course, and on the evening of the same day, Earl Grey, in the House of Lords, announced the resignation of the Government.

This new situation was very perplexing to the opponents of Reform. In the Commons certain resolutions expressive of confidence in the late Ministry, and insisting upon an un mutilated Reform Bill, were carried by a majority of 80. During the debate Sir Robert Peel strongly censured the proposal to create new peers for the purpose of carrying this or any measure, as bad in itself and very dangerous as a precedent. The King applied to the Duke of Wellington for advice, being desirous of entrusting to him the formation of a Government, but the Duke was obliged in the end to recommend the recall of Earl Grey and his colleagues. Peel stated in the House of Commons that he had assured Lord Lyndhurst that it was utterly impossible for him to accept office on the understanding that a Reform Bill should be proposed containing the leading provisions of the recent measure. He also pointed out to the Duke of Wellington that he (Peel) was not the proper person, from his hostile views, to propose a compromise on this question. The Whig Government consequently came in again, and the three Reform Bills for England, Scotland, and Ireland were speedily carried through both Houses, a large number of peers absenting themselves from the debates. Early in August the various Bills received the royal assent, and this great and long-agitated question was finally settled.



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## CHAPTER VII.

### PEEL IN OPPOSITION.

ALTHOUGH the Tories, after the passing of the Reform Bill, were numerically a small party, they were well organized, harmonious, and ever upon the alert. With such a diminished host it might naturally be supposed that the Tory leader would lose heart; but Sir Robert Peel comforted himself with the reflection that his party would yet have abundant means for testifying its power and influence, while the circumstances and difficulties surrounding the heterogeneous Whig majority were somewhat ominous for the future of that great party. Moreover, he indulged the further reflection that in the long run the middle classes, from good and sufficient motives, would not prove themselves dangerous to the cause of order, but must ultimately range themselves upon that side. For the present there was but one attitude for the Tories, namely, that of watchfulness.

Peel had not long to wait before the new Government, wafted into power by the popular will, began to feel that it was beset by unusual obstacles. The first reformed Parliament had barely met when disunion manifested itself in the ranks of the Ministerialists. On the election of Speaker the advanced Radicals broke away from the

Ministry and proposed their own candidate, who was, however, defeated by a large majority. Then, too, the attitude of the Irish Catholics, as represented by O'Connell, continued to be very embarrassing. The Address, in which the resolve to maintain the legislative union between Great Britain and Ireland unimpaired was emphatically expressed, was described by the member for Dublin as "a bloody, brutal, unconstitutional Address," and he went on to attack the Whigs, Mr. Secretary Stanley (afterwards Lord Derby) in particular. The latter retorted with equal point and power. Peel followed, complimenting the Secretary, and intimating that he was prepared to support the Address. Then he turned upon O'Connell, animadverting on his conduct in making the question of repeal the subject elsewhere of appeals to the ignorance, the passions, and the prejudices of the Irish, while he shrunk back from bringing it to a fair discussion before the Legislature. He maintained that the hon. member was bound to show—first, that the misgovernment of Ireland had been so great, and that there was such a prospect of its continuance, as to justify the repeal of the union; and, secondly, that in the event of repeal being carried the two countries could continue in amity under the Sovereign without a prospect of the dismemberment of the empire. This he had not done, and could not do. The speaker cited passages from O'Connell's speeches in Ireland which were very damaging to the great agitator, and in the completeness of his answer it was felt that he had even transcended the previous speaker, Mr. Stanley. In closing his address, Peel announced that whenever he saw the Government disposed to maintain the rights of property, the authority of law, and in a qualified sense the established order of

things against rash innovation, he should without regard to party feeling deem it his duty to support them. "Without the slightest intention of returning to office, but believing it would be a public misfortune in the present crisis of the country that the hands of the Government should be weak, it is my determination to strengthen them as much as possible. I know that the country can only be governed through the House of Commons, and I feel that my opinions are not in accordance with those which are supposed to influence the majority of this House ; and having, on the other hand, no disposition to conform to theirs, I shall, consulting public utility alone, support the Government upon grounds as independent as those of men boasting of the most liberal opinions, or returned by the largest constituencies of England." O'Connell gained a little support from the few English members who thought that the Government were inclined to deal too harshly with Ireland, but his amendment to the Address was defeated by the enormous majority of 428 to 40 votes.

Irish questions occupied a considerable space in the legislation of 1833. Peel supported the measure of Lord Althorp for the suppression of ten bishoprics, and other reforms in the Irish Church ; but he detected in the Cabinet a difference of opinion on a matter which was destined to be the subject of future debate, namely, whether Church property might be devoted to secular uses, or whether it must be wholly applied to ecclesiastical purposes. The condition of Ireland at this time was such that the Government were obliged to introduce a Coercion Bill, empowering the Lord Lieutenant to prohibit public meetings of a dangerous tendency, suspending the writ of Habeas Corpus, authorising domiciliary visits

by magistrates, and other methods of repression. Nine thousand crimes, arising from the insurrectionary condition of the country, had been committed in the year 1832, of which two hundred and forty-two were homicides. The debate on the first reading of the Bill in the Commons was signalised by a smart rhetorical duel between Mr. Stanley and Mr. O'Connell. Peel supported the demand for legislation. He had heard from two Ministers of the Crown, he said, a detail of atrocities, the recital of which made the blood run cold. There was an admission on all sides that the condition of society in many parts of Ireland was most alarming—that the worst crimes had been committed with impunity. Citing statistics in connection with the subject, the right hon. gentleman added that the crimes were aggravated by circumstances of needless cruelty and barbarity, such as would not have been perpetrated by the savages of New Zealand. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Kildare had observed that “murders, blasphemies, perjuries, rash swearing, robberies, assaults on person and property, the usurpation of the powers of the State and of the rights of the peaceable and well-disposed, are multiplied and every day perpetrated, at the instigation of the devil, by the wicked and deluded men engaged in these confederacies.” After a severe thrust at O'Connell for exciting the passions of the populace for his personal ends, Sir Robert Peel thus concluded a long and fervid appeal to the members of the House: “Range yourselves on the side of order; lend the weight of your authority to the law; and from that hour you will instil confidence into the peaceable and well-disposed, and strike terror into the coward hearts (for they are cowards) of nightly assassins. Then will men breathe a new

atmosphere; then will the position of the friends of order and its enemies be reversed; and those who suffer will come forth with voluntary testimony to aid the law which gives them redress for past injury and protects them from renewed wrong. But if you shrink from your duty, if you pause for a fortnight, if you cover your irresolution under the flimsy veil of requiring further time to consider, then take these consequences: the contagion of depravity will extend; the places yet healthy will be infected; the whole land will become a moral wilderness, in which every principle of government will be subverted and every rule of justice reversed; in which there will be no punishment except for innocence, and no security except for triumphant guilt."

The first reading of the Coercion Bill was carried by 466 votes to 89. The Whigs, though cordially disliking this measure, and aware that in some respects it would do them harm, were obliged to pilot it through Parliament in consequence of the condition of Ireland. Meantime Peel continued to grow in favour as a party leader through such means as his masterly demolition of the principles of Mr. Attwood, who proposed a return to the paper and small-note currency, and his vigorous speech against the Ballot. "I object to the Ballot," he said, "because it would make the House more democratic than it is already, and I think it democratic enough. I say so openly. I do not wish to conceal that I think the House of Commons as democratic as is consistent with the principles of the constitution and with the maintenance of the just authority and undoubted privileges of the other branches of the Legislature." Replying to the argument that the Ballot would destroy the influence of property, he affirmed that if the influence of property in



elections were destroyed, the security of all property and the stability of all government would be destroyed with it. In the course of the same speech he made the significant admission that there were arguments in favour of extending the franchise to women to which it would not be easy to find any logical answer. Mr. Grote's motion for the adoption of the Ballot was lost by 211 to 106, the division list showing a considerable disagreement in opinion upon this subject between the various sections of the Liberal party.

The Charter of the Bank of England was renewed in the year 1833, and with it the exclusive privileges of the Bank were continued, so that it should remain the principal and governing monetary association of the empire. The paper of the Bank of England was also made a legal tender for all sums above £5, except by the Bank itself or its branches; and it was further enacted that bills of exchange drawn at a certain limited date should be exempt from the usury laws—a provision which at periods of crisis worked great commercial evil. Sir Robert Peel opposed the proposal of the Government as giving an appearance of inconvertibility to paper. He predicted that people would never place confidence in Bank paper merely because an Act of Parliament called upon them to do so. While Peel was right in his consistent opposition to the creation of fictitious credit, experience has shown that he was wrong in the extreme view he took upon the question of Bank paper.

There were some other topics of an important nature on which Peel addressed the House during this session. The sufferings of the Poles excited a good deal of commiseration in this country, but when the matter was brought before the notice of the House of Commons, Peel showed

that the House could not interfere, unless it were prepared to follow up its protest by a declaration of war against Russia. At the same time he was not indifferent to the wrongs and sufferings of a gallant people, and he fully shared in those feelings of indignation which, if the conduct of Russia had been truly described, would be unanimous throughout the House and the country. A proposition having been made to abolish entirely the system of patronage in the Church of Scotland, and to vest the appointment of pastors in the congregations, Peel opposed it on the ground that popular election would diminish the independence of the minister. He also pointed out other objections to the principle proposed, but stated that he was ready with the House to apply himself to the removal of any real abuses in the Church of Scotland.

The memorable session of 1833 closed on the 29th of August, the King proroguing Parliament in person. Besides the legislation indicated, important statutes were passed concerning the East India Company and the Government of India; but by far the most important act of the session was that for the abolition of colonial slavery. The sum of twenty millions sterling was voted as compensation to the West India proprietors, and the objects for which Wilberforce and other philanthropists had long laboured were at length successfully achieved.

But the fates seemed to be against the Whig Ministry, notwithstanding the beneficent legislation of 1833. It had been already weakened by the secession of Lord Durham, and the prospects of the session of 1834 could not be viewed with complacency. "It thus happened that moderate men of all parties, including some of the most

active reformers themselves, began to look to Peel as the Minister most likely to conduct the affairs of the country, without truckling to O'Connell in Ireland and the more violent Dissenters and Radicals in England on the one hand, and without reviving Orangeism and Toryism on the other. Peel, almost without exertion, found himself at the head of the Conservatives, while the Whigs, much to their surprise and annoyance, found themselves by the force of unfortunate circumstances ranged in the category of destructives. The whole course and direction of the session of 1834 strongly tended to increase and confirm this view of parties throughout the country; it was a session of strange revolutions and of still stranger political combinations." Making allowance for political sentiment, this is a succinct view of the position.

The session opened with an episode between Mr. Sheil, Lord Althorp, and O'Connell, in consequence of a charge of double-dealing towards Ireland made against the first-named member. Peel defended Sheil, who was afterwards completely exonerated by the report of a committee appointed to investigate the charge. This incident added to the discredit of the Ministry; but graver difficulties were impending. O'Connell brought forward the Repeal question by moving for a select committee to inquire into the means by which the union had been carried, and the effect of the measure upon Ireland. The Irish orator spoke for six hours, though the task was somewhat irksome to him, his ardour for Repeal having considerably cooled. The most spirited and eloquent speech during the debate was delivered by Peel. After showing the advantages accruing from the union, and adducing arguments why it should not be dissolved, he said that the question whether the union ought to have

taken place was perfectly distinct from the question whether, having taken place, it ought to be dissolved. Measures had been enacted, Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, and so on, constituting changes in the state of society in Ireland, which would probably never have been contemplated, certainly not safely adopted, had Ireland retained her separate legislature. "These changes oppose new obstacles, in addition to all to which I have before referred, to the measure of Repeal. They will aggravate every danger with which the system of government that existed prior to the union was pregnant. They will destroy every check upon the influence of numbers and physical strength, as opposed to the influence of property and station and character. Beware how you act in the presumptuous confidence that you can restore by artificial devices the equilibrium that has been thus disturbed, that you can launch a new planet into the social system, can set bounds to its librations, can so adjust the antagonistic forces which are to determine its orbit, that it shall neither be drawn back into violent contact with the mass from which it has been severed, nor flame through the void of space a lawless and eccentric meteor. To do this is far beyond the grasp of your limited faculties—far beyond any intelligence, save that of the Almighty and Omniscient power which divided the light from the darkness, and ordained the laws that regulate in magnificent harmony the movements of countless worlds." In the end the motion was negatived by 523 votes to 38, and both Houses of Parliament adopted an address of loyalty to the King, pledging themselves to maintain unimpaired and undisturbed the legislative union between Great Britain and Ireland.

A prognostication of Peel's with reference to diver-



gences of opinion in the Cabinet was now to be verified. Mr. Ward brought forward a motion for appropriating the surplus revenues of the Church of Ireland for the purposes of government. By way of meeting this motion it was suggested that a commission should be issued to examine into the relations between the Protestant establishment in Ireland and the spiritual wants of the Protestant population. The appropriation of Church property to secular uses was repugnant to four members of the Cabinet—Mr. Stanley, Sir James Graham, the Duke of Richmond, and the Earl of Ripon—who accordingly resigned their offices. Their places were supplied, if not adequately filled, by the Marquis of Conyngham, the Earl of Carlisle, Lord Auckland, and Mr. Spring Rice. The royal commission was carried, but it failed to conciliate the enemies of the Establishment, while it still further alienated its most attached friends from the Ministry.

A serious rupture in the Government upon another question speedily followed. It appeared that in the communications which at various times had been made by Ministers to Mr. O'Connell on Irish affairs, the great agitator had been confidentially informed that when the Irish Coercion Bill was renewed the clauses prohibitory of meetings would not be pressed; but the obnoxious clauses appeared in the Bill notwithstanding, and O'Connell charged the Irish Secretary with having practised deception on him. He also declared that the obligation of secrecy under which the communication had been made was now dissolved. Unable to carry the Coercion Bill through the Commons with the clauses against public meetings, Lord Althorp resigned office, a step which was followed immediately by the resignation of



the Premier, Earl Grey. Lord Melbourne now took office as Prime Minister, and Lord Althorp and his colleagues agreed to serve under him.

A new Coercion Bill, divested of the objectionable clauses, was passed. Ministers were in some difficulty how to meet the Bill introduced by Mr. G. W. Wood for the purpose of opening the universities to Dissenters. They were anxious to conciliate the Dissenters, and yet the Bill was most distasteful to the bishops and the clergy. Sir Robert Peel opposed it, alleging that when the disabilities of Roman Catholics and Dissenters had been removed, there had never been a hint that the State should be precluded from maintaining an established religion. If this Bill were allowed to become law—if they discountenanced the universities as schools of religious instruction—if they entitled Dissenters to enforce their claims by means of a *mandamus* from a court of law—and if they put an end to the connection at present subsisting between the Church and the universities—they would be doing an act of infinite prejudice to the established religion of the country, without, in his opinion, achieving any material or substantial benefit for the Dissenters. The Bill passed the Commons, but was eventually rejected in the Lords.

Parliament was prorogued on the 15th of August. An enormous number of Acts had been proposed during the session, but only two were of the first importance, viz. the Central Criminal Court Act and the Poor Law Amendment Act. In the following autumn there was great discontent amongst the working classes. Strikes frequently occurred, though ultimately the popular agitation was allayed.

In November the Melbourne Administration came to

an end. Yet so little had any political event of importance been anticipated that Sir Robert Peel had gone abroad. Lord Althorp, having succeeded his father as Earl Spencer, took his seat in the Upper House, the Government thus being left without a Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the 14th Lord Melbourne accordingly waited upon the King at Brighton to take his commands respecting Lord Althorp's successor. His Majesty surprised the Premier by objecting to the reconstruction of the Cabinet, and finally intimated that he had resolved upon committing the task of Government to other hands. The King further made Lord Melbourne the bearer of a letter to the Duke of Wellington, inviting his Grace to form a new Cabinet. The Duke waited upon his Majesty on the 16th, but, either feeling that he could not hope to conduct the King's Government successfully at this crisis, or sinking his own claims on behalf of his late colleague, he advised that Sir Robert Peel should be sent for.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PEEL'S FIRST ADMINISTRATION.

TRAVELLING in Italy at the time the King's messenger reached him, Peel received with genuine surprise the offer of the highest post in the Government. Hastening from Rome, he arrived in London on the 9th of December, and had an interview with his Majesty. He accepted the position of Premier—which the Duke of Wellington had provisionally filled—though with considerable mistrust of the feelings of the country, and extreme doubt of his chances of success. His invitation to Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham to join the new Administration was unsuccessful, and he was obliged to fall back upon the old opponents of progressive measures. The new Premier immediately issued his address to the electors of Tamworth, an address which now ranks among the few great State papers issued on similar occasions. He assured the electors that the course he had adopted in accepting office had not been taken without deep and anxious consideration. He would not, however, accept power on the condition of declaring himself an apostate from the principles on which he had heretofore acted. At the same time he had never been, either before or

after the Reform Bill, the defender of abuses or the enemy of judicious reforms. In proof of this, he appealed with confidence to his currency and criminal law reforms. Then followed these important passages on the subject of Reform: "With respect to the Reform Bill, I will repeat now the declaration which I made when I entered the House of Commons as a member of the Reformed Parliament—that I consider the Reform Bill a final and irrevocable settlement of a great constitutional question, a settlement which no friend to the peace and welfare of this country would attempt to disturb, either by direct or by insidious means. Then, as to the spirit of the Reform Bill, and the willingness to adopt and enforce it as a rule of government: if, by adopting the spirit of the Reform Bill it be meant that we are to live in a perpetual vortex of agitation; that public men can only support themselves in public estimation by adopting every popular impression of the day—by promising the instant redress of anything which anybody may call an abuse—by abandoning altogether that great aid of government, more powerful than law or reason, the respect for ancient rights and the deference to prescriptive authority—if this be the spirit of the Reform Bill, I will not undertake to adopt it. But if the spirit of the Reform Bill implies merely a careful review of institutions, civil and ecclesiastical, undertaken in a friendly temper, combining, with a firm maintenance of established rights, the correction of proved abuses and the redress of real grievances—in that case I can, for myself and colleagues, undertake to act in such a spirit and with such intentions."

Parliament was dissolved on the 30th of December, and a political struggle of some bitterness ensued

throughout the country. Peel was unjustly credited in certain quarters with an intention to return to the old ideas of Protestant ascendancy; but, notwithstanding this, the Tories increased their numbers at the poll by about one hundred members, exclusive of the Stanley, or "Derby-dilly," party. This did not secure a majority for the Premier, though his followers were much more compact and numerous than in the previous session, when the Conservatives were never able to collect upon any one occasion a larger number than 174.

Parliament met on the 10th of February, and Peel now began a gallant struggle against a formidable Opposition, a struggle in which he displayed the utmost command of temper, almost unbounded sources of information, and a vigorous and comprehensive grasp of affairs. No party leader ever showed in a more favourable light than did the Premier in the early part of the session of 1835, or one which won for him more genuine admiration. Notwithstanding a ministerial defeat on the election of Speaker—Mr. Abercromby, the Whig candidate, being substituted for Mr. Mannors Sutton—Peel brought forward his leading measures with the utmost dispatch, and conducted them with signal ability. Beaten on the Address by a majority of nine only in a House composed of 611 members, the Premier declared that he did not think the majority against him sufficient to warrant him in retiring before submitting his measures. A misunderstanding having arisen between Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Hume, the former wrote a letter to his antagonist which bore, or was said to bear, somewhat the aspect of a challenge. Mr. Hume returned a satisfactory response, but the Premier's letter was brought under the notice of the House by Mr. Roebuck, who proposed to make it a



breach of privilege. This was resented on all sides, and the motion was withdrawn. Mr. Attwood, the member for Birmingham, reminded the Premier that the latter had once brought in a very good Bill, which passed into law, rendering it a capital felony for one gentleman to pull a trigger against another, or strike a man with a blunt instrument to do him bodily harm. He hoped the right hon. gentleman would not forget his own child. This adjuration drew from Peel the witty and memorable retort, received with great laughter and cheering, "The hon. member is himself guilty under the same Act, because he certainly has inflicted pain on me with a blunt instrument."

The spirit in which Peel assumed the reins of Government will be apparent from this declaration of his policy, made in the early days of the session: "I call upon you not to condemn before you have heard, to receive at least the measures I shall propose, to amend them if they are defective, to extend them if they fall short of your expectations; but at least give me an opportunity of presenting them, that you yourselves may consider and dispose of them. I make great offers, which should not be lightly rejected. I offer you the prospect of continued peace, the restored confidence of powerful states that are willing to seize the opportunity of reducing great armies, and thus diminishing the chances of hostile collision. I offer you reduced estimates, improvements in civil jurisprudence, reform of ecclesiastical law, the settlement of the Tithe question in Ireland, the removal of any real abuse in the Church, the commutation of the tithe in England, the redress of those grievances of which the Dissenters have any just ground to complain. I offer you those specific measures, and I

offer also to advance, soberly and cautiously, it is true, in the path of progressive improvement. I offer also the best chance that these things can be effected in willing concert with the other authorities of the State, thus restoring harmony, ensuring the maintenance, but not excluding the reform (where reform is really requisite), of ancient institutions."

The ministerial plan for the relief of Dissenters in relation to the celebration of marriage was generally approved by the country, and a plan was also proposed for the adjustment of tithe in Ireland. But these measures were insufficient to appease the Whigs. Ireland was still destined to be the rock ahead. On the 30th of March Lord John Russell brought forward his motion, "That the House do resolve itself into a committee of the whole House to consider of the temporalities of the Church of Ireland." His lordship confessed that to his mind Peel and his colleagues had no ground to stand upon, and he could not see how they would keep themselves out of that great Serbonian bog to which Mr. Burke had alluded—

" The great Serbonian bog  
Betwixt Damiata and Mount Casius old,  
Where armies whole have sunk."

On the one hand they might stand on the notion of private property and maintain the ecclesiastical revenues intact and inviolate to their original destination ; or, on the other hand, admitting the right of Parliament to interfere, hold that for the benefit of subjects of the realm, for their religious instruction, for the well-being and harmony of society and the State, it might so interfere. But there was no resting place between the two propositions.

The debate on Lord John Russell's resolution was very

protracted. Several eminent Whigs spoke and voted with the Ministerialists upon this question. Sir Robert Peel, in closing the debate, admitted that the resolution might probably enable his opponents to embarrass the future progress of the Administration. But in the moment of their pride he warned them that, though triumphant in the House, the power they exercised did not act without those walls with that intensity with which it operated within. "The duty I have voluntarily assumed," he continued, "compels me to place before a triumphant conqueror the vanity of human wishes and the instability of mutual triumphs, but yet I must not shrink from it; and I tell you that notwithstanding your vaunted majorities, you do not control public opinion. That public opinion will enforce on you the necessity of taking a direct and open course. The people of England will not sanction attempts to throw unfair obstacles in the way of the Executive Government. They would sanction a direct vote of want of confidence, so far at least as to consider it a legitimate and constitutional act of hostility. Why have you not the manliness to propose it? Why do you implore me to undertake the settlement of this question upon your principles? You are confident in your strength: let me ask you are you competent to undertake the Government? If you can, undertake it. If you are not, why do you embarrass us? I will not enforce your resolution. I give you notice of the course that I mean to pursue. I shall oppose your motion for a committee; I shall oppose your resolution in committee; and above all things, and most strenuously, I shall oppose your communication of that resolution to his Majesty." The Premier announced that he should adhere to the principles of his own tithe measure, and if

he found that he could not proceed to an immediate settlement of the question, he would acknowledge that the time had arrived when he could no longer continue to hold office.

Lord John Russell's motion was carried by a majority of 33—there being for the appropriation of the surplus revenues of the Irish Church to secular uses, 322; and for the retention and application of those revenues to strictly ecclesiastical purposes, 289. The initial engagement in the campaign having been won, Lord John next proposed that any surplus of the revenues of the Church of Ireland not required for the spiritual care of its members, should be applied to the general education of all classes of the people without religious distinction. This second proposition was carried by 262 to 237. A third motion was then brought forward as follows: "That it is the opinion of this House that no measure upon the subject of tithes in Ireland can lead to a satisfactory and final adjustment which does not embody the principle contained in the foregoing resolution." This was carried by 285 votes against 258.

This series of defeats upon a question on which the Ministry were pledged to a policy of resistance necessarily led to the resignation of the Government. It was not a matter that could be postponed or shelved, and there was but one course for Peel and his colleagues to adopt. They accordingly resigned their offices, and in announcing this in the House of Commons on the 8th of April, the Prime Minister briefly recapitulated the circumstances which led to the step. It was one, he said, which the Government had taken with the utmost reluctance, seeing that they were in possession of the entire confidence of the King; but they had deemed it

a part of their public duty not to persevere in a useless struggle, which might involve his Majesty and political parties in the country in additional and unnecessary difficulty. The vote of the previous night, in addition to being a vote of want of confidence, opposed such difficulties in the way of the practical administration of affairs in Ireland, that it made it next to impossible for them to undertake the execution of the law in that country. The hostile vote of the House was tantamount to a declaration that the Government would be obstructed in the progress of the Tithes Bill ; and being firmly resolved to adhere to the principle of that measure, they respectfully requested his Majesty to permit them to retire. "The whole of my political life," said the right hon. baronet, "has been spent in the House of Commons ; the remainder of it will be spent here ; and whatever may be the conflicts of parties, I for one shall always be anxious to stand well with the House, whether I be in a majority or in a minority. I do not hesitate to declare that, under no circumstances, under the pressure of no difficulties, would I ever have advised the Crown to resign that great source of moral strength which consists in a strict adherence to the practice, to the principles, to the letter, and to the spirit of the constitution of this country. I am confident that that adherence will be the surest method of warding off eventful dangers. It is because I believe, in conformity with that constitution, a Government ought not to persist in carrying on public affairs after a fair trial against the decided opinion of a majority of the House of Commons—it is because I have that conviction deeply rooted in my mind that I have relinquished my post ; although I do sincerely regret the necessity which has compelled me to abandon the King's



service at the present moment." This reluctance to quit the helm of public affairs is explainable on two grounds : first, the condition of the Whig party, composed as it was of heterogeneous and discordant elements ; and secondly, the desire of Peel to signalise his Administration by the passing of useful and practical legislative measures.

These hopes were frustrated, however, and the Ministry came to an end. Yet although Peel was in a minority, it was admitted on all hands that he left office stronger than when he entered upon it. He had welded the Tory party together, so that it was now a formidable and compact whole. The Premier's farewell speech extracted admiration from his opponents, and Lord John Russell declared that the retiring Minister had acted with the most honourable fidelity to the spirit of the constitution. "Peel's whole heart was in the public service," as a writer holding opposite political principles to his own has observed. "He seemed actually to love toil. He was indefatigable and most conscientious in the performance of his official duties. The veriest drudge of office was not more constant at his desk. The most plodding committeeman could not rival him in the persevering regularity of his attendance in the House of Commons. During his short but most memorable Ministry of 1835, he went through an amount of labour that was almost incredible. He was Chancellor of the Exchequer as well as First Lord of the Treasury. He had scarcely a single colleague competent to afford him efficient aid. He had to struggle against a hostile House of Commons and a mistrusting country. The fight was not of his choosing, and he knew from the first that it was a hopeless one. But he contended gallantly to the last, toiling

incessantly from seven o'clock in the morning till long past midnight, and when at last he resigned he had risen fifty per cent. in public estimation."

Continued perseverance in the attempt to govern by a minority—as Peel expressed the matter in a communication to the King a few days before his resignation—would naturally render it difficult for an Administration, however composed, to recover due control over the House of Commons. Moreover, the House of Commons, having been habituated to the exercise of functions not properly belonging to them, would be unwilling to relinquish it; and thus the Royal prerogatives and Royal authority must inevitably suffer from continued manifestation of weakness on the part of the executive Government. Instances might arise—indeed such cases are upon record—where a Ministry would be justified in retaining office after an adverse vote of the House of Commons; but the relations between Peel and a majority of the House in the session of 1835 prevented his Ministry of that period from coming within that category.

## CHAPTER IX.

### DECLINE AND FALL OF THE WHIGS.

EARL GREY having declined to take office, Lord Melbourne again became Premier. Lord John Russell was appointed Home Secretary ; Lord Palmerston, Foreign Secretary ; the Right Hon. Spring Rice, Chancellor of the Exchequer ; and the Marquis of Lansdowne, President of the Council ; the remainder of the offices being filled as in the previous Liberal Ministry. The new Government possessed only a small majority in the House of Commons, and its difficulties began with the resumption of office. Lord John Russell having announced that he and his colleagues would be obliged to postpone until another session the introduction of the expected measure on Church-rates, Sir Robert Peel reviewed the history of the controversy, affirming that it was a practical question, and one that required immediate settlement. He maintained that the noble lord was under a peculiar obligation to advance the settlement of the question. If the late Government had turned their attention to the question of a commutation of tithes and of Church-rates, they might have been prepared to have brought forward measures this session. To make announcements of principles without being prepared to act

upon them only tended to increase the dissatisfaction of the people. An executive Government fit to be entrusted with the administration of the affairs of this great country must feel that this question of Church-rates ought not to be left to the discussion of parish vestries, or to be made the subject of resistance by parochial martyrs for another year. Nothing, however, was done in the question.

Peel was again called upon to defend his currency measures, which he did with vigour and effect. Mr. Cayley having brought forward a motion for the adoption of a double standard, the Conservative leader justified his policy of 1819, which had been endorsed on several occasions since by the House. Believing that the agriculturists had no real interest in the proposition apart from a depreciation of the currency, and thereby robbing the public creditor, and feeling it to be inconsistent with the honour and integrity of the House of Commons to lend itself to any measure which would have that result, he would not permit the pretext of a vague inquiry into agricultural distress to blind him as to the real objects of the proposition, which was neither more nor less than through a depreciation of the standard to seek a relief which would not, he believed, be effectual; and which, if effectual, would, he was confident, be dishonest.

During the session of 1835, however, one memorable measure was passed. This was the Municipal Reform Act, its principal feature being that it vested the local government of a town in the rated and permanently resident inhabitants. In the council were vested the entire deliberative functions of the Corporation. They appointed the town clerk and treasurer, and from them

the mayor and aldermen were chosen. The English Municipal Corporations Bill almost led to a rupture between the Lords and Commons. The Commons rejected the Lords' amendments, and it was hinted that the supplies would be cut off. Affairs became so grave that Sir Robert Peel, who had left London before the close of the session, returned for the purpose of lending his assistance in reconciling the differences between the two Houses. These differences were at last adjusted by mutual concessions, and the Bill for municipal reform—the corollary to the Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832—passed into law.

The Bill for Irish Municipal Reform met with a different fate. Peel strongly opposed it, being afraid that the establishment of the Irish corporations on a popular basis would put into the hands of O'Connell the same power over the elections of municipal officers as he already wielded in connection with Parliamentary elections. This conclusion was somewhat hastily arrived at, and it had the unfortunate effect of rousing into activity national and religious jealousies which were falling into abeyance. In explaining why the Opposition refused any form of municipal government to the Irish, Peel said that in towns having their corporations and their corporate justices independent of the control of the Crown, fresh causes of division and discontent would be consequent on the frequent elections which the Bill would render necessary. "Do you believe that this Bill," he asked, "will assuage existing animosities? Do you believe that it will conduce to the administration of equal laws, to introduce this system of annual elections in one hundred and twenty towns in Ireland, placing too the police in the hands of the dominant party? Are they,



too, to have the appointment of the officers by whom the grand and petit jurors are selected? Whichever is the party that prevails, you should not permit it to inflict injustice." The speaker quoted O'Connell to show that the town councils would be converted into normal schools for teaching the science of political agitation. He demanded that they should not make the graduates in those schools and the professors in the science of agitation the chosen instruments to wield the civil force of the State and to dispense public justice. The Conservatives allowed the second reading of the Bill to pass, but on the motion for going into Committee they attempted a trial of strength, but were beaten by a majority of 64. In the Lords the measure was so transformed that the Commons could not accept it, and ultimately the Bill was abandoned. The loss of the measure left a strong feeling of bitterness in the minds of the Irish people against the Conservative party.

Having been put in nomination for the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow University, in opposition to Sir John Campbell, Peel was elected by a large majority. When the new Lord Rector was installed, a grand banquet was given at Glasgow in his honour by his political friends and admirers. In an extremely able and liberal speech, Peel made this remarkable admission: "I see the necessity of widening the foundations on which the defence of our constitution and of our religious establishments must rest." He agreed with the Reformers that the machine of government should not be allowed to stand still, though he would not sanction constant intermeddling with the essential functions of the machinery. He then went on to declare that he meant to support the national establishments which connected Protestantism with the

State in the three countries, as well as the House of Lords in its full integrity.

The death of William IV. on the 20th of June, 1837, and the accession of Queen Victoria, necessitated a general election. The Ministry gained strength in Ireland and Scotland ; but in England there was scarcely an appreciable difference in the number of their supporters, while in many of the counties they sustained serious defeats. No great question was grappled with in the first session of the new Parliament ; but a Civil List Bill was passed, providing a total sum of £385,000 annually for the use of the Sovereign.

Evidence of the power and solidity of the Conservative party was afforded in the month of May by a public dinner given to Sir Robert Peel at Merchant Taylors' Hall. Three hundred Conservative members attended, being more than double the strength which the party could command shortly after the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. An alliance had, moreover, been formed between Peel and Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham. With this accession of strength the Conservative leaders were confirmed in their hostility to the Whigs. Sir Robert Peel made at this banquet a full exposition of his policy, in probably the most important extra-Parliamentary speech he ever delivered. He stated that his object had been for some years past to lay the foundations of a great party, which, existing in the House of Commons, and deriving its strength from the popular will, should diminish the risk and deaden the shock of collisions between the two deliberative branches of the Legislature. He alluded to the accession of Lord Stanley and Sir James Graham to the Conservative party as a union, not the result of conferences, not the offspring of

negotiations, but originally brought about by the force of circumstances, and afterwards cemented by mutual co-operation, by reciprocal confidence and respect. Referring to the surprise manifested in some quarters that so strong an Opposition should not more frequently demonstrate its power, the right hon. baronet explained that their duty as Conservatives was to maintain the ancient institutions of the land. "We have no desire to exalt the authority of the House of Commons above the prerogative of the Crown ; we have no design to undermine the privileges of the House of Lords ; on the contrary, it is our duty to defend them. The field of opposition occupied by those who seek to reduce and cripple our establishments is denied to us, because we wish to see the naval and military establishments of the country maintained in proper vigour and efficiency. It is not for us to inflame popular discontent by the exaggeration of public abuses. Nor can we lend the Crown our arm to shake or curtail the liberties of the people. And therefore, in estimating the course we have adopted, those who feel some impatience with our apparent indifference and passiveness, should always recollect that the principles maintained by an Opposition do impose some practical restraint on the conduct they must pursue."

Peel then showed that the Whig Government had been obliged to rely on the aid of the Conservative party, as against its own Radical allies, upon three great questions, viz. the proposed exclusion of the bishops from the House of Lords, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the Ballot. It was by moderation, by prudence, and by an undeviating adherence to their principles that the Conservatives had attained to their present position. He hoped they would never adopt the advice which was

sometimes received from ardent friends and professed admirers, namely, to abandon altogether their duty in the House of Commons for the purpose of creating embarrassment, by leaving the Government to fight out the battle by themselves. "My firm belief is, that by steadily performing our legislative functions, by attending to our duty, by censuring Ministers, or attempting to censure them when censure may be required, on all occasions by enforcing our principles, by amending their measures when they require amendment, though, at the same time, we should rescue them from temporary embarrassment, yet we shall thereby be establishing new claims on the public approbation." Lord Stanley, who followed Peel in an eloquent speech, said the new alliance was promoted on the strongest motives which could act on private feeling or influence public conduct—it was founded on a sense of common danger, on the conviction of a common interest.

In the spirit of these utterances public questions were approached in Parliament. Minor topics were thrown into the shade in the session of 1839 by two questions, one of them being that of the Corn Laws. Mr. C. Pelham Villiers, long an advocate of Free Trade, but now trusted and supported by the manufacturers themselves, introduced the subject in the House by moving, on the 19th of February, that evidence to prove the injurious effects of the Corn Laws should be received at the bar of the House. The motion was lost by a large majority; but Mr. Villiers, undismayed by his defeat, on the 12th of March moved that the House should resolve itself into a committee to consider the laws for regulating the importation of corn. The debate lasted for five nights. Peel delivered a lengthy speech, in the course of which

he asked what had become of the argument as to the depressed condition of manufactures. If profits were so unreasonably low, how did it happen that the number of new factories had greatly increased within the past few years, that the factory destroyed by accident was instantly replaced, and that new factories were constantly erected? As to the effect of the Corn Laws on the condition of the labourer, he (the speaker) had no hesitation in saying that unless the existence of the Corn Law could be shown to be consistent, not only with the prosperity of agriculture and the maintenance of the landlord's interest, but also with the protection and the maintenance of the general interests of the country, and especially with the improvement of the condition of the labouring class, the Corn Law was practically at an end. By statistics showing the great increase in deposits at savings banks, and other arguments, he endeavoured to prove that this was not so. He also replied to the contention that the costs of freight and transport gave sufficient protection to British farmers, and that there was no need to dread competition in corn, while there was every cause for alarm at the growing competition in manufactures. He then went on to advocate restrictive duties as a provident insurance against the dangers of famine—an argument, however, which he completely reversed in 1846. He argued that the more we increased our dependence on foreign supply, the more did we increase, in the event of severe and general pressure, the risk of a monetary derangement. The proposal for total and immediate repeal he put on one side as not sufficiently serious. On the question of a fixed duty he demanded fuller and clearer information from the Government. They must have considered how the fixed duty was to be maintained in



the seasons of deficient supply and threatened famine ; whether it was to be enforced at all hazards ; whether it was to be relaxed under certain circumstances, and, if so, by what authority and on what conditions it should be relaxed, and, after relaxation, reimposed. He maintained that it had been under the influence of protection to agriculture, continued for two hundred years, that the fen had been drained, the wild heath reclaimed, the health of a whole people improved, their life prolonged, and all this not at the expense of manufacturing prosperity, but concurrently with its wonderful advancement. Turning upon the Ministry, Peel said : “ If you had called upon us to abandon this protection with all the authority of a united Administration, with the exhibition of superior sagacity and triumphant reasoning, we might not have been deaf to your appeal ; but when inviting us to follow you, you present nothing but distracted councils, conflicting colleagues, statements of facts not to be reconciled, and arguments leading to opposite conclusions, then we peremptorily refuse to surrender our judgments to your guidance, and to throw the protection secured to agriculture by the existing law into the lottery of legislation, in the faint hope that we might by chance draw the prize of a better Corn Bill.” When the House divided there were—for going into committee, 195 ; against, 342 ; majority in support of the Corn Laws, 147. But this division did not cause the opponents of the Corn Laws to slacken their efforts.

The second question which arose resulted in the temporary resignation of Ministers. On the 9th of April a Bill was brought in, on the motion of Mr. Labouchere, to suspend the executive constitution of Jamaica, and to make provision for its temporary government. In

consequence of a dispute between the Governor of that island and the Legislative Assembly, no public business could be proceeded with ; and it was proposed by this Bill to vest the government in the Governor and a council only, to be continued for five years. Early in May, when the order of the day for going into committee on the Jamaica Bill was moved, it was opposed by Sir Robert Peel in an elaborate speech. He exposed the arbitrary provisions of the Bill, the enormous power it would confer on the Governor and commissioners, and the impossibility of imposing an effectual check on the abuse of power exercised at a distance of three thousand miles. In supporting this view Peel alluded to the mode of treating refractory colonies formerly suggested by Mr. Canning, who declared that "nothing short of absolute and demonstrable necessity should induce him to moot the awful question of the transcendental power of Parliament over every dependency of the British Crown ; for that transcendental power has an arcanum of empire which ought to be kept back within the penetralia of the Constitution." On a division being taken there appeared — for going into committee, 294 ; against, 289 ; the majority for Ministers being thus only five. Ten Liberals voted with the Conservatives, and five Conservatives with the Ministry. The next day Lord John Russell and Lord Melbourne stated that with so narrow a majority Ministers were unable to conduct the public service with advantage, and had accordingly tendered their resignations.

Peel was now sent for, and entrusted with the task of government. That which followed has been well epitomized by M. Guizot. Peel accepted the burden laid upon him, but feeling uneasy at the personal hold which Lord

Melbourne had obtained over the Queen, he considered it necessary for the Conservatives, on assuming the reins of Government, also to prove that they possessed the entire confidence of the Sovereign. He accordingly requested that the principal offices in the royal household, including the appointment of ladies of the bed-chamber, might be placed at his disposal—an idea which it is said originated with the Duke of Wellington. The Queen, who was herself wounded by the demand, was assured by the Whigs that the pretension was exorbitant, and utterly unauthorised by precedent. The great ladies of the Conservative party had, moreover, spoken of it as a triumph over the Queen, and had said when they composed her court they would be better able to restrain her within constitutional limits than the Whigs had been. All this came to the knowledge of her Majesty; and on the day after the demand had been made, the Queen wrote to Sir Robert Peel as follows: "The Queen, having considered the proposal made to her yesterday by Sir Robert Peel to remove the ladies of her bed-chamber, cannot consent to adopt a course which she conceives to be contrary to usage, and which is repugnant to her feelings." This incident came to be known as "the bed-chamber plot." Peel replied, maintaining that he was constitutionally in the right, and stating that, in view of the existing crisis, it was necessary that he should have that public proof of her Majesty's entire support and confidence which would be afforded by the permission to make some changes in that part of the royal household, which her Majesty resolved on maintaining entirely without change. Neither Monarch nor Minister could now give way, and the negotiation was broken off. Debates arose on the subject in both

Houses ; Wellington and Peel adhered to their opinions, while the Whigs vindicated the Queen's refusal, and declared that they were perfectly ready to accept the responsibility of it. As the only solution to the difficulty, Lord Melbourne once more returned to office.

But the Whigs were beset with difficulties, and instead of regaining the public favour, the Government continued to lose ground, and grew gradually weaker. At length in January, 1840, Sir J. Y. Buller proposed a vote of want of confidence in the Ministry. During the important debate which ensued, Mr. Macaulay, who spoke with great eloquence, said he believed that if, with the best and purest intentions, Sir Robert Peel were to undertake the Government of the country, he would find that it was very easy to lose the confidence of the party which raised him to power, but very difficult indeed to gain that which the existing Government possessed, the confidence of the people of Ireland. Challenged to explain himself on the Irish question, and to state the views and principles of conduct which would guide him if he were placed at the head of the Government, Peel frankly replied to the challenge. Two demands were made, viz. that he should specify the grounds of his want of confidence in the Government, and should state his own principles of public policy. "The absolute justice of the first of these demands I willingly admit," he observed. "The other demand, namely, that I should explain in detail my views of public policy, is perhaps not equally imperative in point of strict obligation, but it is a demand to which, from considerations of prudence, I shall most willingly accede. There shall be no limit to the fulness and the unreservedness of the answers which I will give, excepting your impatience. I know too well

the little value that can be placed on that support which arises from misconception of one's real opinions. I have had too much experience of solemn engagements, entered into for the purpose of overturning a Government, violated when that object has been attained. I have so little desire to procure a hollow confidence, either on false pretences or by a delusive silence, that I rejoice in the opportunity of frankly declaring my opinions and intentions on every point on which you challenge unreserved explanation."

He then answered his opponents in detail, and referred at length to the great public questions of the time, Reform, the Privileges of Parliament, the Poor Law, the Corn Laws, Catholic Emancipation, the Ballot, and the administration of Ireland. On each of these subjects he recapitulated his expressed opinions, indicating his future policy if the Government were entrusted to his hands. "It may be," he said in conclusion, "that the principles I profess cannot be reduced to practice, and that a Government attempting the execution of them would not meet with adequate support from the House of Commons. Still I shall not abandon them. I shall not seek to compensate the threatened loss of confidence on this side of the House by the faintest effort to conciliate the support of the other. I shall steadily persevere in the course which I have uniformly pursued since the passing of the Reform Bill, content with the substantial power which I shall yet exercise—indifferent as to office so far as personal feelings or present objects are concerned—ready, if required, to undertake it, whatever be its difficulties—refusing to accept it on conditions inconsistent with personal honour—disdaining to hold it by the tenure by which it is at present held."

Ministers obtained a majority of 21 on this occasion,



but on the 18th of May, 1841, they were defeated upon their measure for the reduction of the duties on foreign sugars. In the course of the debate Sir Robert Peel taunted Ministers with not possessing the confidence of the country, and in regard to the Corn Laws expressed his own unhesitating resolve to abide by them. Lord Sandon's amendment to the Ministerial measure was carried by 317 to 281. The Government did not resign, but manifested an intention to proceed with legislation upon the corn duties.

On the 27th of May Peel seized the opportunity of minutely reviewing the various measures that had been submitted by Ministers to Parliament, but which were subsequently abandoned ; and he also enlarged upon the prejudicial effects on the finances of the country that had accrued from the passing of others. He further pointed out that in every former case where the House had indicated that its confidence was withdrawn from the Government, the Ministers had retired. He maintained that the whole of their conduct betrayed weakness and a servile truckling for popular favour ; and that the prerogatives of the Crown were not safe in their hands. He then moved this resolution : " That her Majesty's Ministers do not sufficiently possess the confidence of the House of Commons to enable them to carry through the House measures which they deem of essential importance to the public welfare, and that their continuance in office, under such circumstances, is at variance with the spirit of the constitution." At the close of a long debate, and in a very full house, consisting of 623 members, Peel's motion was carried by a majority of one. Lord Melbourne upon this advised her Majesty to dissolve Parliament, and it was accordingly dissolved on the 23rd of

June. The elections greatly strengthened the Conservative party. Their triumph in the English counties was in fact extraordinary, for out of 159 representatives for these counties, only 23 belonged to the Liberal party.

The new Parliament met in August. In the Upper House an amendment to the Address was carried against the Ministry by a majority of 72. In the Commons a similar amendment expressive of a want of confidence in her Majesty's advisers led to a debate extending over four nights. Peel in the course of his speech on the amendment referred to the Corn Laws. Before the dissolution he had formed an opinion, which intervening considerations had not induced him to alter, that the principle of a graduated scale was preferable to that of a fixed and irrevocable duty. Speculating upon the result of the debate and the resignation of the Whig Ministry, he said, "If I accept office, it shall be by no intrigue, it shall be by no unworthy concession of constitutional principle, it shall be by no unnatural and factious combination with men (honest though I believe them to be) entertaining extreme opinions from which I dissent. If I accept office, it shall be by walking in the open lights and in the direct paths of the constitution. If I exercise power, it shall be upon my conception—perhaps imperfect, perhaps mistaken, but my sincere conception—of public duty. That power I will not hold unless I can hold it consistently with the maintenance of my own opinions; and that power I will relinquish the moment I am satisfied that I am not supported in the maintenance of them by the confidence of this House and the people of this country."

The division showed a majority of 91 against Ministers, the numbers being—for the Address 269; for the amend-

ment 360. Lord Melbourne now resigned, and Sir Robert Peel received her Majesty's commands to form a Ministry. The principal offices after that of the Premiership were thus distributed: Lord Chancellor, Lord Lyndhurst; President of the Council, Lord Wharncliffe; Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Goulburn; Home Secretary, Sir James Graham; Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Aberdeen; Colonial Secretary, Lord Stanley; First Lord of the Admiralty, the Earl of Haddington; President of the Board of Control, Lord Ellenborough; President of the Board of Trade, the Earl of Ripon; Secretary at War, Sir Henry Hardinge; Paymaster-General, Sir E. Knatchbull; and Secretary for Ireland, Lord Eliot. The Duke of Wellington accepted a seat in the Cabinet, but without office.

## CHAPTER X.

### PEEL'S GREAT ADMINISTRATION.

PEEL was now in office and in power, having a large majority in both Houses of Parliament. He demanded time in which to prepare his measures, and on the 7th of October Parliament was prorogued. Ministers kept their counsel all through the recess, and the Queen's speech at the opening of the session in 1842 was consequently much canvassed. Amongst other things, that document referred to the state of the laws affecting the import of corn, and of other articles the produce of foreign countries. Measures were promised for the improvement of the ecclesiastical courts and of the bankruptcy laws; regret was expressed at the continued distress in the manufacturing districts; and it was hoped that the deliberations of Parliament would be directed by a comprehensive regard for the interests and welfare of all classes, thus tending to improve the national resources, to encourage the industry, and promote the happiness of the people.

Great interest was manifested in the Premier's exposition of his new scheme on the subject of the Corn Laws. This scheme was unfolded on the 9th of February to a crowded House, Sir Robert Peel's speech on that occa-

sion occupying four hours in delivery. He began by admitting the prevalence of distress in the country, yet felt bound to say he could not attribute that distress in any degree to the operation of the Corn Laws, to which it had been supposed to be imputable. Neither did he believe that the sources of our commercial and manufacturing prosperity were dried up. It was impossible to take a review of the causes which had affected the industry of the country without perceiving that there had been in operation during the last four or five years several of such causes, the separate effect of which would have been considerable, but the concurrent effect of which was sufficient to account for the depression under which they had laboured. "If you look to the stimulus which was given, partly I think by the facilities of credit, to the great undertakings in the years 1837 and 1838—to the connection which existed between the companies and the directors concerned in joint-stock banks and our manufacturing establishments—if you look to the immense efforts which were made for the increase of our manufactures, for the building of houses for the reception of those who were to labour at those manufactories, the immigration of labourers from rural districts to those which are the seats of our manufactures, the immense increase of mechanical power which took place in the course of the years 1837 and 1838—you would hardly be surprised that those consequences should have followed those excitements which have frequently followed similar exertions at former periods."

After pointing to a similar condition of things in America, and dealing with the statistics of our colonial trade, Peel came to the subject of the Corn Laws. He observed that those who complained of a tax upon the



subsistence of the people had always an advantage. A comparison was made between this and other countries as to the cost of food, and the inference drawn that the people of England ought to be placed on the same footing in respect of the articles of subsistence with those of other countries. Any conclusion founded on such a position was altogether erroneous. Reference had been made to the price of food in Germany, and it was said that the price of food with us should be equalised with that which existed in Germany. But the true question was not the price of food, but the command which the labouring classes had over it. That included the question whether the people required the necessaries only or the luxuries of life. He advanced statistics in support of his position, and on the question of a fixed duty showed that the effect of such a duty on corn would be that at all times, and under all circumstances, they must admit foreign corn into the country. It should also be remembered that the periods of favourable harvests in the countries from whence we derived our chief supplies of foreign corn generally corresponded with favourable harvests in England. He argued that if our own country produced a sufficient supply of food in certain years for home consumption, it did not render it necessary that we should resort to foreign markets; for if under these circumstances a supply from abroad was brought in, it would be followed by an unnatural depression of the price of food, which would operate as a discouragement to the natural producer, and which must ultimately lead to our dependence on foreign countries for the supply of food—an event which he should most strongly deprecate.

Observing that we could not dispense with the system

of averages while the Tithe Commutation Act existed, Peel proceeded to detail his new plan. If the price of wheat in this country could always be near a certain amount, its oscillations, he thought, should be limited to some such price as between 54s. and 58s. He did not believe it would be for the interests of agriculture that the price should be beyond that. But, when he spoke of this average, he did not mention it as the pivot on which a remunerating price should turn, or as a price that the Legislature could guarantee. Remarking that he retained Protection, but only such protection as was consistent with the welfare of all classes of the community, he said it was of the highest importance that we should take precautions to ensure that the main source of the supply of food should be derived from domestic agriculture. They were entitled to place such a duty on foreign corn as was equivalent to special burdens borne by agriculture, but any additional protection could only be vindicated on the ground of general and comprehensive interests. If they should find themselves dependent on foreign countries for some such import as four or five millions of quarters, and if the calamity of a deficient harvest should be a general one, then they might depend upon it that the interest of self-preservation would prevail in those foreign countries over all others. "There must be many years," said the right hon. baronet, "in which a considerable portion of the food supply must come from foreign countries, but I do not abandon the hope that this country, on the average of years, may produce sufficient for its own consumption. Even if that hope should be disappointed, if you must receive from foreign countries, under ordinary circumstances, an addition to your own supply of food, I draw a material distinction

between that supply, on the one hand, which is casual, which is limited in quantity, and which is brought in for the purpose of repairing an accidental and comparatively slight deficiency; and, on the other hand, that supply which is of a more permanent and extensive nature." This scheme of a revised Corn Law was opposed by Lord John Russell as inadequate, and, of course, it naturally failed to satisfy Mr. Cobden, Mr. Villiers, and the other advocates of Free Trade. After much opposition, however, the measure was passed virtually in its entirety, and became law.

The Premier's next great measure was the new Tariff, accompanied by the Property and Income Tax scheme. In the preparation of these legislative proposals, as well as in that of the new Corn Law Bill, it was understood that Peel had received great and valuable assistance from his able and rising young lieutenant, Mr. Gladstone. The latter had already given proof of his capacity to grasp difficult and intricate questions of finance. On the 11th of March, when the House was again thronged, Peel rose to make his Financial Statement. Dealing first with the condition of the country, he showed that our annual expenditure was annually outrunning our income, and accumulating a growing deficiency. The proposition of the late Ministry for raising £5 per cent. additional on the duties on excise and customs had failed; and Peel having examined every possibility in connection with indirect taxes, came to the conclusion that he could not expect to raise a sufficient additional revenue from any of the great articles of consumption. He declined to seek revenue from these sources, or from locomotion, or from gas, and asked where he should draw his new taxation from. "Shall I resort to the plans invented by those

who in small communities choose to turn their attention to finance, and who think that their inventive genius is on a level with that of Archimedes when they discover a pianoforte, an umbrella, or some such article, not yet made the subject of taxation, and who immediately suggest the scheme to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, accompanied by a modest claim for a large percentage of the amount received, in consideration of the novelty of the thought and the certain success of its operation?" The Premier next announced that in order to recruit the national finances he must make an earnest appeal to the possessors of property. For the purpose of repairing a mighty evil, he proposed that the incomes of the country should bear a charge of sevenpence in the pound, not amounting to quite three per cent. This would not only supply the deficiency in the revenue, but enable him to propose those great commercial reforms which would have the effect of reviving commerce and improving the manufactures of the country in a way that must soon react on every other interest, and which would ensure even in a narrow, pecuniary point of view, by the diminished price of the articles of consumption and the lessened cost of living, compensation to every one subject to the pecuniary charge.

Peel then sketched out his whole scheme, reviewing the course of Pitt's policy upon the income-tax. Under the new arrangement, incomes of less than £150 would be exempted. As to the charge upon land, he proposed that the tenant's occupation of land should be estimated at one-half instead of three-fourths of the rent, as formerly. He further proposed that all funded property, whether held by natives of this country or foreigners, should be subjected to the impost. From

statistics produced, he formed the expectation of raising the sum of £3,771,000 as the product of the property and the income tax, the duration of which, he considered, should be for five years, with the option of putting an end to it in three years. Coming next to Ireland, he observed that as he could not find machinery there similar to that of England for levying the tax, he proposed an increase of duty on Irish spirits and an equalisation of the stamp duties. From these sources, together with an additional duty levied on coal exported to foreign countries, and the product of the property and income tax, he expected to raise altogether an annual sum of £4,310,000.

As this sum would leave a surplus, after meeting the deficiency in the revenue, Peel stated that he should be able to effect a revision in the commercial code by making a considerable abatement of the duties levied upon some of the great articles of consumption. His general principle would be, first, the removal of prohibition in every case, and the relaxation of duties of a prohibitory character; and secondly, the reduction of duties to a very considerable amount on raw materials used in manufactures. In some cases merely a nominal duty would be retained; and in no case, or scarcely any, would a duty of more than 5 per cent. be levied upon raw articles used in manufacture. Upon articles partially manufactured, the duty in future would not exceed 12 per cent.; and on manufactured articles, speaking generally, the maximum duty would not exceed 20 per cent. in any case. The whole of the tariff would be arranged under twenty different heads. Out of 1,200 articles, it was proposed to reduce the duty on 750, including all those which entered into manufactures. There were thus



about 450 articles in respect of which, on comparing the present rate of duty with the cost of the article, it did not appear necessary for the interests of commerce or for the interests of the consumer to make any reduction. Sugar he was unable for a variety of reasons to include in the new tariff, but timber and coffee were included; and it was also proposed to reduce the taxes on stage coaches, so as to enable them more effectually to compete with railroads. With regard to commercial treaties, the Minister expressed a hope of being able to effect such mutually beneficial arrangements between Great Britain and foreign countries as might enable him hereafter to take other measures for the improvement and extension of commerce.

In concluding his exposition of this truly great and comprehensive financial scheme, the Premier made a patriotic appeal to the members of the House of Commons. He begged them to be worthy of the conduct of their fathers in times of national crisis. They had now had twenty-five years of peace, and in view of the financial difficulties and embarrassments in which they were placed, he hoped they would not refuse to make similar sacrifices to those which their fathers made for the purpose of upholding the public credit. "Your conduct will be contrasted with that of your fathers under difficulties infinitely less pressing than theirs. Your conduct will be contrasted with that of your fathers, who, with a mutiny at the Nore, a rebellion in Ireland, and disaster abroad, yet submitted, with buoyant vigour and universal applause (with the funds as low as 52), to a property tax of 10 per cent. I believe that you will not subject yourselves to an injurious or an unworthy contrast. It is my firm belief that you will feel the necessity of preserving inviolate the

public credit—that you will not throw away the means of maintaining the public credit by reducing in the most legitimate manner the burden of the public debt. My confident hope and belief is that now, when I devolve the responsibility upon you, you will prove yourselves worthy of your mission—of your mission as the representatives of a mighty people; and that you will not tarnish the fame which it is your duty to cherish as the most glorious inheritance, that you will not impair the character for fortitude, for good faith, which, in proportion as the empire of opinion supersedes and predominates over the empire of physical force, constitutes for every people, but above all for the people of England—I speak of reputation and character—the main instrument by which a powerful people can repel hostile aggressions and maintain extended empire.”

The new tariff was received with great favour by the commercial classes and the country generally. In some respects it was a great and decided advance towards the adoption of the principles of free trade. Any criticism of details was overshadowed by the acceptance which the scheme found as a whole. Peel met and considered all objections in a firm yet admirable spirit, and although opposition was threatened to the property and income tax, the propositions of the Government substantially passed into law. Mr. Gladstone, as Vice-President of the Board of Trade, introduced and piloted through the House the Bonded Corn Bill, a measure supplementary to the New Tariff Scheme.

Immediately before the close of the session, a sharp passage of arms occurred between Lord Palmerston and Sir Robert Peel. The former welcomed Ministers as converts to the new commercial principles, although they

must have been preparing these measures for some time past. But a great step had been made in the right direction when a Tory Government spoke out as the present Government had done. Peel replied, defending his changes of opinion, and recapitulating equally great changes during Lord Palmerston's own career. This session of 1842 was one of the most arduous of Peel's parliamentary life.

On the 21st of January, 1843, while the Premier was walking with his private secretary, Mr. Drummond, near Charing Cross, the latter was shot by a Scotchman named MacNaughten, who had mistaken him for Sir Robert Peel. The assassin appears to have been swayed by no political motive, and was in fact insane; but the incident made a strong impression upon Peel, which was not without its own results. The Anti-Corn Law League having now become a great fact, it was necessary that the Prime Minister should make some declaration of his intentions with regard to the Corn Laws. Accordingly, when the session opened on the 2nd of February, 1843, he emphatically stated that when asked to come forward and declare whether he contemplated extensive changes in the Corn Laws, he felt it right to avow that her Majesty's Government had it not in contemplation to propose such extensive changes. Upon this the Free Trade agitation acquired greater impetus. In the House, Mr. Cobden said he must tell the right hon. baronet that it was the duty of every honest and independent member to hold him individually responsible for the present position of the country. "I tell him that the whole responsibility of the lamentable and dangerous state of the country rests with him." Peel, greatly excited, in replying said, "Be the consequences of these insinuations

what they may, never will I be influenced by menaces, either in this House or out of this House, to adopt a course which I consider——” He was unable to finish the sentence, and his hearers came to the conclusion that he laboured under the idea that the charge of responsibility made against him was a provocation to his assassination. Mr. Cobden—than whom no man was more utterly incapable of such an insinuation—explained, and Lord John Russell and other Whig members, as well as his friends, defended him from the imputation as an indignity which he could never have deserved. Cobden repeated his disclaimer with emphasis, and Peel accepted his explanation, though not with that cordiality which the circumstances demanded. The Premier’s susceptibility was the cause of this unfortunate misunderstanding, and that susceptibility was doubtless rendered more extreme by the trying nature of his position.

The state of Ireland kindled alarm in the minds of politicians in the year 1843; and Lord Eliot, Chief Secretary, introduced a Bill for continuing the laws with respect to the possession of firearms in that country. The policy of the Government was severely condemned by O’Connell, Sheil, and others, whereupon Peel expressed the anxiety and pain with which he viewed the condition of things in Ireland. Having referred to the removal of the political disabilities of the Roman Catholics, he said, in tones of unfeigned regret, “I thought I saw, in some respects, a great moral and social improvement; that the commercial intercourse of Ireland with this country was increasing; that there was a hope of increasing tranquillity in Ireland, and of a diminution of crime; that the redundant and superfluous capital of this country, which was seeking a vent in foreign specu-

lations of the most precarious nature, would be applied to a sphere more legitimate and more productive—the increasing improvement of Ireland. The agitation has blasted all those hopes.” The agitation for Repeal of the Union proceeded apace. On the 15th of August five hundred thousand Irishmen assembled at Tara. They were addressed by O’Connell, who said that before twelve months were over the Parliament would be in College Green. “The Irish Parliament will then assemble,” said the agitator, “and I defy all the generals, old and young, and all the old women in pantaloons—nay, I defy all the chivalry of the earth—to take away that Parliament from us again.”

A second meeting was summoned for the 8th of October, at Clontarf, near Dublin, O’Connell having issued a manifesto that legal and constitutional means for the redress of Irish grievances had now been exhausted; but a Government proclamation appeared on the 7th of October prohibiting the meeting, and a week later O’Connell and his associates were arrested on charges of conspiracy, sedition, and unlawful assembling. Their trial was appointed for the 10th of January following, in the Court of Queen’s Bench, Dublin.

Meanwhile, though surrounded by embarrassments of various kinds, Peel continued to conduct the affairs of the country with undiminished energy. In matters of foreign policy “he respected the rights and dignity of other states, small as well as great, weak as well as strong, and regarded the employment of menace or force solely as a last extremity, legitimate only when it was absolutely necessary.” Peace and justice were his watchwords in foreign policy. He was seconded in his opinions by his Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen. The



Conservative Cabinet, on taking office, found itself compelled to deal with wars in China and Afghanistan, and serious boundary controversies with the United States. Questions also arose between England and France as to the right of search for the suppression of the slave trade, the occupation of Tahiti, and the war in Morocco. In all these foreign negotiations the English Cabinet manifested an enlightened and conciliatory policy, although Lord Aberdeen was subjected to considerable animadversion, and reproached as being the tool of France. It was predicted that Tahiti would prove a source of greater difficulty than Ireland to the British Government, but the matter of the French occupation of Tahiti was in the end amicably settled, as also was the Morocco difficulty.

The O'Connell prosecution eventually ended in a fiasco. The trial came on in due course; it was exceedingly lengthy, and the arguments were of a very technical character. It ended with O'Connell being sentenced to one year's imprisonment, to pay a fine of £2,000, and to find bondsmen for his good behaviour for five years from the expiration of the term of his imprisonment. Judgments were also passed upon the other defendants. An appeal was made to the House of Lords on a writ of error. The peers referred the matter in the first instance to the English judges, who affirmed the proceedings of the Irish court. But in the following September the question was finally decided by the law lords, a majority of whom declared in favour of the prisoners. The Irish question was thus left, after most protracted proceedings, *in statu quo*.

The session of 1844 was opened on the 1st of February by the Queen in person. The speech referred

to our late successes in India, to the establishment of commercial relations with China, to the good understanding which subsisted between England and all foreign powers, and to the commercial and manufacturing prosperity of the country. Measures for the improvement of Ireland were also promised, though a firm determination was expressed to maintain the Union. Peel, in the debate on the Address, still advocated Corn Law protection, dwelling upon the advantages of his sliding scale as compared with Lord John Russell's proposition for a fixed duty. The Premier maintained that his past measures had fulfilled the expectations he had held out, and that he now met Parliament under greatly improved circumstances both at home and abroad. The Address was voted by a large majority.

The revision of the Bank Charter was the most important measure of the session. No legislation of this year equalled it in magnitude as regards the great interests it involved, or the effects it produced upon the commercial and monetary transactions of the kingdom. By the Act of 1833 it was provided that the charter for securing certain privileges to the Bank of England should expire in 1855, reserving to the Legislature the power of revising the charter ten years earlier. In introducing his measure, Peel stated that this was now his intention. His treatment of the subject, which was remarkably able and lucid, confirmed the impression already created, that in matters of finance he was by far the most capable of living statesmen. He proposed there should be a complete separation of the two departments of issue and banking in the Bank of England; that its business should be conducted on the same principles as governed other bodies dealing with Bank of England notes; that the fixed

amount of securities on which the Bank should issue notes should be £14,000,000 ; that the whole of the remainder of the circulation should be issued exclusively on the foundation of bullion ; and that there should be a complete and periodical publication of the accounts of the Bank of England, with a view to increase its credit and prevent panic. He provided for a weekly account of the issue of notes, the amount of bullion, &c. ; and proposed, on emergency, but only with the assent of three members of the Government, to allow the Bank to extend its issues beyond £14,000,000. The Bank had hitherto paid £120,000 to Government for its privileges, but as its privileges and business would now be increased, he proposed to raise the sum to £180,000. This would be deducted from the sum of £248,000, which the Government paid to the Bank for the management of the public debt. Various provisions affecting joint-stock and private banks were included in the Bill, all tending to the security of the public and the better regulation of business. The proposal limiting the issue and circulation of country notes met with considerable opposition, but the attempts to introduce serious modifications in the Bill were defeated. Peel's original propositions were ultimately carried by a large majority.

Anxious to initiate some legislation for the benefit of Ireland, Peel brought forward in the session of 1845 a proposal for increasing the grant to Maynooth College. The course he adopted, however, alienated from him the sympathies of many of his own followers. Besides the increase of the grant, he proposed the establishment of three Irish colleges for secular education. The Premier said the Government were prepared in a liberal sense and confiding spirit to improve the institution of Maynooth

and to elevate the tone of education there. He proposed, therefore, that a vote for the sum of £30,000 should be taken for the proper accommodation of the president and professors, and for the maintenance and education of five hundred free students. Meeting the strong religious objections which this proposition encountered, Peel said, "We do not think there is any violation of conscientious scruples involved in our proposition. We believe that it is perfectly compatible to hold steadfast the profession of our faith without wavering, and at the same time to improve the education and to elevate the character of those who—do what you will, pass this measure or refuse it—must be the spiritual guides and religious instructors of millions of your fellow-countrymen."

The measure excited violent hostility in some quarters. Sir R. H. Inglis described it as "a gigantic scheme of godless education;" and Col. Sibthorp said that if he had not seen the First Lord of the Treasury take the oaths at the table of the House, he should have doubted whether he were a Protestant, a Roman Catholic, or a Mahometan; nor should he be surprised if the time came when they would see him sitting cross-legged as a Mahometan or embracing the Pope. The Premier was subjected to much vituperation of a similar kind by those who declared that they had lost confidence in him. Meetings were held in Exeter Hall, Covent Garden Theatre, and other places, condemning the scheme as an endowment of the Roman Catholic religion. The Whigs and many of the Radicals supported the Minister, who was fiercely attacked by Mr. Disraeli. The hon. gentleman said that in Peel we had a great Parliamentary middleman, "a man who bamboozles one party and plunders the

other." The ultra-Protestants petitioned by hundreds of thousands against the Bill, describing it as high treason against heaven. The personal and newspaper attacks upon Peel were most bitter, but through all the storm of obloquy he remained firm. Towards the close of the debate on the second reading he reviewed the whole question, and stated that he did not regret the course which he had taken. "I say without the least hesitation, you must break up in some way or other that formidable confederacy which exists in Ireland against the British Government and the British connection. I do not believe you can break it up by force; you can do much to break it up by acting in a spirit of kindness, forbearance, and generosity." In concluding, he used these memorable words: "Punish us; visit us with censure; let the two parties combine against us on the ground that the policy we are adopting ought to be carried out by its original promoters; take what other course you please, but let not your indignation fall on the measure; let it be confined to those who proposed it." The second reading was carried by a majority of 147. The Bill was contested at every stage, but ultimately it passed and was sent up to the House of Lords. Here it was defended by Dr. Whately, the distinguished Archbishop of Dublin. The Bill became law, but its framer in the outset exaggerated its salutary effects. He had, however, taken another important step in the direction of the removal of Irish grievances.

Before we approach the legislation on the Corn Laws, other measures demand mention. By an act framed by the Lord Chancellor, the possession of religious endowments in the hands of Dissenters was confirmed; and an end was put to all legal controversy respecting the right



to voluntary endowments connected with Dissenting chapels by vesting the property in the religious body in whose hands it had been for the preceding twenty years. The validity of Presbyterian marriages was settled; ameliorations of the Poor Law were effected; and the municipal disabilities of the Jews were removed. The Government carried a Bill for modifying the laws affecting the labour of children in factories, though not without much discussion, and a threat pointing to resignation on the part of the Premier. A singular incident arose during a debate on the sugar duties. An amendment was carried against the Government reducing further than they proposed the duty upon colonial and in some instances foreign sugars. Peel was not present at the time, but a few days later he went over the whole subject. Ministers, he said, had proposed measures which had made little progress, and left them in no enviable position. They had not received cordial assent and agreement in those quarters where they reasonably expected to find support. But if they had forfeited the confidence of their supporters, they would not ask for it by encouraging expectations which they were not prepared to realise. Ministers thought their own course the right one, and were prepared to abide by the engagements they had made. Some of Peel's followers remonstrated against his attitude, but he would not yield. Mr. Disraeli complained that the Premier dragged his followers unreasonably through the mire. "The right hon. baronet has joined in the anti-slavery cry; but it seems that his horror of slavery extends to every place except the benches behind him. There the gang is still assembled, and there the thong of the whip still sounds. . . . He may be right, he may be

even to a certain degree successful, in pursuing the line of conduct which he has adopted, menacing his friends and cringing to his opponents ; but I for one am disposed to look upon it as a success neither tending to the honour of the House nor to his own credit." Peel made no reply to these taunts. There were those who thought that he should have defended himself and his friends ; but acrimonious personal contests were most distasteful to him, and herein, probably, lies the chief reason for his silence. The House answered to the Premier's call, and at the close of the debate reversed its previous vote.

Peel continued to manifest his superiority as a practical statesman and a financier, but signs of dissatisfaction and disorganization began to exhibit themselves in the ranks of his followers. There was one question at the opening of the session of 1845, moreover, which attracted much attention, and caused considerable speculation as to the policy of the Government. This was the income-tax, which had been voted in 1842 only for a period of three years definitely. On the 14th of February the Premier submitted his financial statement to the House. He had a prosperous revenue to deal with, and he manipulated the various financial questions involved in the Budget with his usual skill. It appeared that on the 5th of January, 1845, there was a surplus amount over the expenditure of £3,357,000, and that by making the account up to the approaching 5th of April he might reasonably estimate the actual surplus revenue at £5,000,000. This sum, he observed, would be either sufficient for the repeal of the income-tax, or it would enable him to make large remissions in general taxation. He decided on the latter course, and proposed that the

income-tax should be imposed for three years longer. His chief financial propositions were the following: the duties on British plantation sugar he proposed should be reduced from 25s. 3d. per cwt. to 14s. per cwt., and the foreign free-grown sugar from 35s. 9d. to 23s. 4d. He proposed also the total repeal of the duty on cotton-wool, amounting to five-sixteenths of a penny per lb., and yielding a revenue of £680,000; the repeal of the auction duty, £250,000; of the duties on glass, £640,000; of the export duty on coal, £183,000; and of reductions on duty on the numerous minor articles in the tariff to the extent of £320,000. These sums, together with an estimated loss on the sugar duties of £1,300,000, would amount to £3,388,000. Peel concluded by remarking that the Government had not sought popularity by avoiding the question of continuing the property-tax. They had selected taxes for reduction and abolition against which there had been no agitation. It was their conviction that industry and commerce would be immediately benefited by their proposals. The details of the Budget were variously criticised, but the ministerial proposals were adopted by large majorities. Peel's ascendancy was still complete, and the Opposition shrank from making attacks upon his financial propositions, in respect to which his position was regarded as invulnerable.

The Free-traders, disappointed at the non-fulfilment of their hopes, now redoubled their exertions for the abolition of the Corn Laws. At the opening of the session, referring to the agricultural distress, Peel said that he could not look to Parliament for any further legislative interference. The restoration of the former amount of protection was impossible; but he would go no further. Mr. Cobden thereupon submitted his

motion for an inquiry into the causes of agricultural distress. He brought forward trenchant arguments in favour of Free Trade, and was by turns simple and ingenious, familiar and eloquent, urgent and not bitter, abundant in facts and adroit in argument, evidently animated by a profound conviction and a sincere patriotism, and totally free from jealousy and democratic hostility. He demanded to know the plan of the Conservatives, and hoped it was not a mere pretence. If they gave him a committee of that House, he would explode the delusion of agricultural protection. He would bring forward such a mass of evidence that the system could not live for two years afterwards. He warned the aristocracy against obstructing the spirit of the age.

Mr. Cobden's speech was a very powerful one, and the Premier himself was to some extent shaken by it. It was circulated broadcast over the country, thus acquiring immense influence. The Prime Minister left the task of replying to it to Mr. Sidney Herbert, who opposed the inquiry principally on the ground that it was useless, and had already been attempted several times without producing any other effect than to spread alarm. Mr. Herbert having observed that the agriculturists did not come whining to Parliament at every period of temporary distress, Mr. Disraeli took up the phrase and severely commented upon it. He charged the Premier with playing fast and loose with the country gentlemen, but at last being compelled to interfere he sent down his valet, who said in the gentlest manner, "We can have no whining here." "For my part," continued Mr. Disraeli, "if we are to have Free Trade, I, who honour genius, prefer that such measures should be proposed by the hon. member for Stockport (Mr. Cobden) than by one who by

skilful parliamentary manœuvres has tampered with the generous confidence of a great people and a great party. For myself, I care not what may be the result. Dissolve if you please the Parliament you have betrayed, and appeal to the people who, I believe, mistrust you. For me there remains this at least—the opportunity of expressing thus publicly my belief that a Conservative Government is an organized hypocrisy.” This attack drew Peel to his feet. Having answered various charges made against him by both sides, he thus briefly replied to Mr. Disraeli : “The hon. member for Shrewsbury repeats an accusation he made on a former occasion of our having retained power by a forgetfulness of the pledges we gave in Opposition. When I proposed the tariff in 1842, and when that charge which the hon. member now repeats was made against me, I find the hon. gentleman got up in his place and stated, ‘that that charge had been made without due examination of the facts of the case,’ and that ‘the conduct pursued by the right hon. baronet was in exact, permanent, and perfect consistency with the principles of Free Trade laid down by Mr. Pitt. His reason for saying this much was to refute the accusations brought against the Government that they had put forward their present views in order to get into power.’ These sentiments I find attributed to Mr. Disraeli. I do not know whether they are of sufficient importance to mention them in the House ; but this I know, that I then held in the same estimation the panegyric in which I now regard the attack.” The retort in this case, from its coolness and brevity, was more cutting than the attack.

In domestic policy the weakest effort of the Government was that made to check the railway mania of 1845, which attained to such a feverish and universal pitch as to



become a gigantic species of gambling. The people rushed madly to partake in any railway speculation that was set afloat, and the railway department of the Board of Trade failed to put an effectual check upon the numberless undertakings put forward. At length the Legislature enacted that before petitions for Bills could be presented to Parliament £10 per cent. on the estimated capital should be lodged with the Accountant-General. Yet so great was the rage after railway stocks that at one time a sum of £15,000,000 on account of deposits was actually vested in the Accountant-General's hands. The Government contemplated other legislation on this subject, but it had to give way to more important subjects.

In the autumn the question of the Corn Laws assumed a formidable and irresistible importance. The deficiency in the harvest, the reduced quantity of grain remaining in the country, the probable limited supply available from foreign parts, the potato disease in Ireland, and the fearful condition of the population generally in the sister island—all these things gave the final blow to the system of Protection. Mr. Bright, Mr. W. J. Fox, Mr. Cobden, and the other leaders of the League, had now overwhelming arguments to support their principles, and they pressed them home with much force and eloquence. Referring to Peel, Mr. Bright said he knew well enough what was wanted. "He sprang from commerce, and, until he has proved it himself, I will never believe that there is any man—much less will I believe that he is the man—who would go down to his grave, having had the power to deliver that commerce, and yet not having the manliness, honesty, and courage to do it." Mr. Fox said there were many reasons why the Premier, rather than any other man whatsoever, should grant this

measure and become its author; and that, having gradually led forward the adoption of free-trade principles in the various acts of our commercial legislation, he should at length crown the whole with this. Mr. Cobden was even still more outspoken. "There is no man in the world," he said, "whether he be the Grand Turk, or whether he be a Russian despot, who has more power than Sir Robert Peel has in this country. He has the power, and I say he is a criminal and a poltroon if he hesitates a whit."

Finally, the accumulated facts and arguments on this question, together with the powerful reasons above enumerated, prevailed with the Premier, and he resolved on bringing forward his great measure of relief. He had previously proposed several plans, but had been supported only by three members of his Cabinet, Lord Aberdeen, Sir James Graham, and Mr. Sidney Herbert. A letter from Lord John Russell to his constituents, the electors of the City of London, enlarging upon the serious crisis in the condition of the country, had the effect of precipitating matters. Lord John now demanded entire freedom of trade, and was supported in this demand by other Whig leaders. Concessions by the Government were now inevitable. On the 25th of November, 1845, at a Cabinet Council, Peel advocated the only course possible. The Duke of Wellington, who had previously opposed repeal, now gave way, but Lord Stanley adhered to his protectionist principles. Early in December it was prematurely announced in the press that the immediate abolition of the Corn Laws had been resolved upon. Instead of Parliament being called together, on the 6th Ministers tendered their resignation, and Lord John Russell was summoned from Edinburgh to form a

Cabinet. Being in a minority in the House of Commons, his lordship almost decided upon declining the task committed to him; but on the Queen placing in his hands a letter from Sir Robert Peel, in which that statesman promised his aid to the Whigs on the Corn Law question, he accepted the task. Fruitless negotiations now took place, in which "the Whigs aimed at too much security, and Sir Robert at too much liberty." Lord John Russell asked for the ex-Premier's plans, and the latter said he did not feel bound to divulge them; he had given in his adhesion to the general principle.

Unable to reconcile the personal differences between certain of the leading Whigs themselves, however, Lord John Russell was obliged to give up all hope of constructing a Government. Sir Robert Peel was again sent for. He had told the Duke of Wellington of Lord John's inability to form a Ministry, adding that the country was now without a Government, and that for his own part he was resolved to sacrifice his desire of retirement to a sense of duty. The Duke, being thus appealed to, consented to join the Cabinet, which was reconstructed on the same basis as Peel's former Ministry, with the single exception of Lord Stanley, who retired. His lordship was succeeded in the office of Secretary for the Colonies by Mr. Gladstone.

The battle of Free Trade was now drawing near its close.

## CHAPTER XI.

### REPEAL OF THE CORN LAWS.

THE Premier had accepted a task which he knew must bring down upon him obloquy and misrepresentation; but having put his hand to the plough, he resolved not to look back. There had been periods already when he had been subjected to unworthy imputations, but these were destined to be far transcended by the one that was now dawning upon him. He accepted office for the purpose of accomplishing one great and grand object; and when this was done it was generally assumed that his party would go to pieces. It seems strange that this honesty should have been impugned, when he deliberately chose a course of conduct that must assuredly result in the alienation of his friends, and one that involved unusual and overwhelming sacrifices on the part of a political leader. Supported by the consciousness, nevertheless, that he was acting solely for the public interest, he pressed forward to the achievement of his great end. Such inconsistency as his will ever be condoned by a grateful people.

Parliament met on the 22nd of January, 1846, and the Royal speech expressed gratification on the prosperous state of the revenue, as well as the general improvement

which had taken place in the internal condition of the country. The hope was also expressed that a further reduction of the protective duties would be found to insure the continuance of the prosperity of the people. The Addresses in the two Houses were carried without a division.

In the Commons, Sir Robert Peel tendered a full explanation of the late ministerial crisis, and also of the views and intended measures of the Government. He observed that the immediate cause which led to the dissolution of the late Government was that great and mysterious calamity, the failure of the potato crop. It appeared to him to preclude further delay, and to require immediate decision as to the course to be taken with regard to the Corn Laws. But while he stated the failure of the potato crop to be the immediate cause, he would not withhold the homage which was due to the progress of reason and to truth by denying that his opinions on the subject of Protection had undergone a change. His experience during the last three years had confirmed him in his new opinions ; and he felt no hesitation in declaring that change, however much he might by so doing incur the imputation of inconsistency. While he had been reviled for apathy and neglect, he and his colleagues were at that very time engaged in the most extensive and arduous inquiries into the true state of the ✓Irish scarcity; and in the course of those inquiries he had come to the conclusion that the protective policy was unsound, and therefore untenable. The Premier concluded with a review of the public services he had rendered under four sovereigns, remarking that if power had any value it was because it gave increased opportunities for rendering public service. It was no easy task to insure the harmonious and united action of monarchy,



aristocracy, and a reformed House of Commons ; but these objects they had attempted to accomplish, and he did not think they were inconsistent with a pure and enlarged Conservatism. But he claimed freedom in the retention of power. " I will not stand at the helm during the tempestuous night if that helm is not allowed freely to traverse ; I will not undertake to direct the course of the vessel by observations taken in the year 1842. I will reserve to myself the unfettered power of judging what will be for the public interest. I do not desire to be Minister of England ; but while I am Minister of England I will hold office by no servile tenure ; I will hold office unshackled by any other obligation than that of consulting the public interests and providing for the public safety." This address was received with great favour by the Opposition, but it was bitterly attacked from the ~~Conservative benches by Mr. Disraeli~~, who charged the Premier with treachery, and prophesied the degradation and demoralisation of the House of Commons if the principles to which they had listened were to be acknowledged.

The House of Commons was densely crowded on the 27th of January, when Sir Robert Peel explained his great scheme for the repeal of the Corn Laws. He began his exposition by assuming that the repeal of prohibitory and the relaxation of protective duties was in itself a wise policy ; and observed that during the last three years there had been an increased productiveness in the revenue, notwithstanding a large remission of taxation ; there had also been an increased demand for labour, and increased competence, comfort, contentment, and peace among the population. He advised the continued application of principles which had produced such

salutary results. If the resolution now proposed were deemed rash, nothing could be more easy than to meet him on an early night with a resolution that protection to domestic industry was in itself a good, and that the principle ought to be sanctioned by the House. But it might, on the other hand, be the desire of the House to put an end to a contest that had long existed. He was not about to apply the great principle of relaxation of duty to any one particular interest; on the contrary, he asked all the interests of the country—manufacturing, commercial, and agricultural—to make the sacrifice, if it were one, of their protection to the common good. Having shown from the legislation of 1842 and 1845 ✓ that he had given the manufacturers free access to every ✓ raw material of manufacture, he called upon such of them as were engaged in making up the three articles, wool, linen, and cotton, to relinquish the protection which was now given to the articles of their manufacture. It was intended to abolish all duties upon the importation of the coarser articles of manufactures in wool, linen, and cotton, and to reduce the duties on linen and woollen goods of a finer quality from 20 to 10 per cent. The silk duty would be readjusted, and the duties upon brandy, sugar, leather goods, &c., would be reduced.

Coming next to articles of agriculture, the Premier stated that he proposed to reduce the duty on all seeds to 5s. per cwt. ; Indian corn, or maize, which was of great importance in fattening cattle, would in future be introduced duty free, as would also buckwheat maize and buckwheat flour. The duty on butter, cheese, hops, &c., would be reduced to half its present amount ; and on all articles of agricultural produce which constituted food as distinct from corn, he proposed an immediate repeal of

duty. Though he did not intend to propose the immediate repeal of the Corn Laws, he did intend to propose that their continuance should only be temporary. The Bill which he should introduce on this subject would therefore contain an enactment that, after a certain date, grain of all kinds should come in duty free. A considerable reduction would be made at once in the existing amount of duty, and the duty so reduced would be limited in its continuance—till the 1st of February, 1849. As to the main question before the House—the intermediate state of the law—he proposed that until the date already mentioned there should be levied certain reduced duties on all wheat imported into this country from foreign parts. These duties he specified, remarking that he intended to accompany the arrangement proposed, by provisions calculated to advance the interest of that portion of the community which would be called upon to relinquish Protection.

Reviewing some of the burdens which fell upon land, Sir Robert Peel referred first to the highway rates, and said he proposed to compel parishes to unite themselves into districts for the repair of the roads. Those districts would be generally the same with the poor-law unions, and thus the high roads would be under the control of 600 instead of (as at present) 16,000 different authorities. He also indicated certain changes in the law of settlement which would operate favourably in the agricultural interest, and relieve it from a great burden. Another important point was that in order to give facilities to the improvement of agricultural skill and industry, he proposed that State loans should be granted to enable improvements to be made, security of course being taken to protect the country against loss. This was another plan by which

he hoped to enable the agricultural interest to meet competition with the foreign grower. With respect to the local burdens pressing on the agriculturist, he must declare at once that he could not advise any alteration in the mode of the assessment of the poor-rates. They were not really a charge upon the land. He would, however, relieve the agricultural interest of the charge of maintaining prisoners in the county gaols, and would provide for that charge by an annual vote of the House. He would also transfer the charge for prosecuting felons to the State.

If there was any part of the United Kingdom likely to suffer from the withdrawal of Protection, continued ✓ the Minister, it was Ireland; for Ireland had not, as England had, the means of finding employment for her agricultural population in her manufacturing districts. Amongst social advantages, consequently, to be placed against the relief from local burdens, he proposed that all the charge for the rural police in Ireland should be thereafter borne by the public treasury. With regard to the cost of medical relief of the poor, he proposed to relieve English and Scotch unions of half this charge, and to take it upon the Government. Medical relief in Ireland, being under a different system, would be hereafter dealt with. Government would also bear part of the charge for education in the parish workhouses, together with the salaries of auditors, and other officers.

Before this law was rejected he hoped that both parties would remember it proposed great benefits for society at large. But in making these great reductions on the importation of articles, he could give the House no guarantee that foreign countries would follow our example. He had resolved to consult our own interests



alone, and not to punish other countries and ourselves by continuing high duties, and the necessary concomitant of high duties—smuggling. He could not promise them that foreign countries would exhibit any gratitude for what they were doing; on the contrary, they might attempt to profit by it. But our export trade had flourished in spite of increased duties upon it. He was convinced, however, that in time other countries would follow our example. If asked why he had determined to disturb our domestic prosperity, he answered that what had occurred since October, 1845, was one of the grounds on which he had resolved to bring forward his present proposition. There was a sympathy existing between manufacturers and the operatives, which led both of them to the conclusion that these laws ought to be altered. Although there was now a calm and no coercion, things might undergo a change. They might have worse harvests, and therefore they ought to avail themselves of an adjustment of this question, which must ultimately be made, and which could not long be delayed without endangering the peace and security of the empire. He recommended his proposition to the calm consideration of the House, in the hope that it would, in the language of her Majesty's speech, "promote friendly feelings between different classes, provide additional security for the continuance of peace, and maintain contentment and happiness at home by increasing the comforts and bettering the condition of the great body of the people."

The debate on the ministerial propositions extended over nearly three weeks, forty-eight members speaking in favour of Free Trade, and fifty-five on behalf of Protection. Mr. Philip Miles began the discussion by moving an amendment for the rejection of the Government



scheme. Lord John Russell supported the Ministry, but begged the Prime Minister to reconsider the point as to the period of three years before the total abolition of the corn duties, and to decide in favour of immediate change. In defending his plans, Sir Robert Peel said that with regard to the party question raised he had nothing to say; for party interests the Government measures were bad measures. But, as he showed by the terrible news from Ireland, this legislation was pressing for the welfare of the country. They could not stand still in this matter. Which would be their motto, 'Advance' or 'Retrograde'? Other countries were watching their example. 'Times of depression must perhaps return; unfavourable seasons, gloomy winters may again set in; "the years of plenteousness may have ended," and "the years of dearth may have come;" and again you may have to offer the unavailing expressions of sympathy and the urgent exhortations to patient resignation. Commune with your own hearts, and answer me this question: will your assurances of sympathy be less consolatory—will your exhortations to patience be less impressive—if with your willing consent the Corn Laws shall have then ceased to exist? Will it be no satisfaction to you to reflect that by your own act you have been relieved from the grievous responsibility of regulating the supply of food? Will you not then cherish with delight the reflection that, in this the present hour of comparative prosperity, yielding to no clamour, impelled by no fear—except, indeed, that provident fear which is the mother of safety—you had anticipated the evil day, and, long before its advent, had trampled on every impediment to the free circulation of the Creator's bounty?'

This powerful speech was described by Mr. Bright as one more to be admired than any which had been delivered within the memory of any man in the House. He had watched the right hon. baronet as he went home on the previous night, and, for the first time, envied him his feelings. Turning to the Conservatives, Mr. Bright said, "You chose the right hon. baronet and placed him in office. Why? Because he was the ablest man of your party. You always said so, and you will not deny it now. . . . There are such things as the responsibility of office. Look at the population of Lancashire and Yorkshire, and ask yourselves whether with all your valour, and although you talk of raising the standard of Protection, there are men in your ranks who will take their seats on the Treasury bench pledged to a maintenance of the Corn Law. I defy them {to do it." Mr. Disraeli again reiterated his charges against the Premier, affirming that the country was flourishing because they had given it a just, judicious, and moderate Protection. In England we ought to give a preponderance to the agricultural over the manufacturing interest. Sir George Clerk, in a very able reply to Mr. Disraeli, repudiated this idea both as a member of Parliament and as an individual landowner. Mr. Cobden said the debate turned on two topics, the conduct of Ministers and the propriety of an appeal to the country, and he warned the Conservatives that the more they covered the Ministers with obloquy and odium, the more would the people of England sympathize with them. If Sir Robert Peel should visit the manufacturing districts, his march through them would be one continued triumph.

When the House divided, there appeared—for Government, 337; against, 240; majority, 97. At a later

stage of the measure, on the 2nd of March, Mr. Villiers proposed as an amendment the immediate abolition of all duties on imported corn. Many members, with Lord John Russell, thought this might endanger the Government scheme, and the amendment was rejected by a majority of 187. The second reading came on upon the 20th of March, when another amendment for the rejection of the Bill was moved by Mr. E. Yorke. In closing the debate, Sir Robert Peel vindicated his own conduct and measures from the repeated attacks made upon them, and said, "I am not surprised to hear hon. members predict to me that my tenure of power is short. Let these measures pass into a law. Suspend your indignation until then ; and then it will be perfectly open to you to determine what measure you will adopt for the purpose of terminating my political life." The House divided as follows : for the second reading, 302 ; against, 214 ; majority, 88. Further discussions took place, but on the third reading the ministerial majority had risen to 98. The measure went up to the Lords, and a long debate ensued on the second reading. The division gave these figures : contents, 211 ; non-contents, 164 ; majority for the second reading, 47. In the end the Bill passed and became law.

By one of those dramatic surprises which sometimes occur in political life, the moment of Peel's greatest triumph was destined also to be that of his downfall as a Minister. A Bill framed for the repression of outrage in Ireland was introduced in the House of Commons on the 30th of March by Sir James Graham. Lord G. Bentinck and his friends resolved if possible to avenge the agricultural interest by defeating this Bill. In fact, the leader of the disaffected Conservatives, alluding to Peel, said

that every honest man ought to join to do summary justice upon the traitor, however much he might love the treason. Mr. Cobden repudiated such a construction of the vote which he and those who thought with him felt compelled to give. During the debate Sir Robert Peel warmly denied the charge of having harassed Mr. Canning to death, brought against him by Mr. Disraeli and Lord George Bentinck, and adduced evidence in support of his denial. The union of the Whigs, Radicals, and Conservatives resulted in a majority of 73 against the Government, the numbers being—for the second reading of the Bill, 219; against, 292. This division took place on the 26th of June, being the very day upon which the Corn Law Bill passed in the House of Lords.

This result was not altogether unanticipated, and the Ministerial defeat came at the moment when intelligence had arrived of a peaceful settlement of the difficulty which had arisen with America on the Oregon question, and when England herself was generally in a prosperous condition. On the 29th of June the resignation of the Government was announced in both Houses. In the Commons, Sir Robert Peel reviewed at length his political career, and justified his policy, which had been so much assailed. Referring to the Free Trade question, he paid the following tribute to Mr. Cobden: "Sir, there is a name which ought to be associated with the success of these measures; it is not the name of the noble lord the member for London, neither is it my name, sir; the name which ought to be and which will be associated with the success of these measures, is the name of a man who, acting I believe from pure and disinterested motives, has advocated their cause with untiring energy, and by

appeals to reason enforced by an eloquence the more to be admired because it was unaffected and unadorned—the name which ought to be and which will be associated with these measures is the name of Richard Cobden.” The speaker closed with a personal allusion which has become more widely known than any other utterance throughout his long parliamentary career: “In relinquishing power, I shall leave a name, severely censured I fear by many who, on public grounds, deeply regret the severance of party ties—deeply regret that severance not from interested or personal motives, but from the firm conviction that fidelity to party engagements—the existence and maintenance of a great party—constitutes a powerful instrument of government; I shall surrender power severely censured also by others who, from no interested motive, adhere to the principle of Protection, considering the maintenance of it to be essential to the welfare and interests of the country; I shall leave a name execrated by every monopolist who, from less honourable motives, clamours for Protection because it conduces to his own individual benefit; but it may be that I shall leave a name sometimes remembered with expressions of goodwill in the abodes of those whose lot it is to labour and to earn their daily bread by the sweat of their brow, when they shall recruit their exhausted strength with abundant and untaxed food, the sweeter because it is no longer leavened by a sense of injustice.”

The Minister who began life as the champion of the aristocratic party thus closed it with an appeal to the great body of the common people. With these dignified words he took leave of his official career. It is stated that the applause which followed his peroration was loud and prolonged, and that on leaving the House



he found the approaches all thronged. Upon perceiving Peel, all in that great crowd took off their hats, and, opening their ranks to let him pass, accompanied him in silence to the door of his house. That moment was one in which the statesman might, with just and legitimate pride, feel that he had not lived in vain.

## CHAPTER XII.

### LAST YEARS AND DEATH.

ON the fall of Peel's second Administration a Whig Ministry was formed, with Lord John Russell as Premier. The Government received the cordial though independent support of the late Prime Minister, who frequently tendered his advice upon the various public measures brought forward. There was no political jealousy in Sir Robert Peel; for office itself he had never cared; and now that he was relieved of its burden he placed the practical benefit of his experience at the service of his successors. As an opponent he was most disinterested; "time had chastened the few prejudices he possessed, and his clear head was undisturbed by any of those clouds with which the passions or promptings of the heart obscure the judgments of most public men." Peel, however, liked the sense of personal influence in politics, and was still drawn strongly towards the arena in which that influence had for so many years been displayed.

The cheerfulness with which he went out of office was manifested in a letter to his friend, Lord Hardinge. "You will see," he observed, "that we are defeated by a combination of Whigs and Protectionists. A much less

emphatic hint would have sufficed for me. I would not have held office by sufferance for a week." And again, "There is nothing I would not have done to insure the carrying of the measures I had proposed this session. But the moment their success was insured, and I had the satisfaction of seeing two drowsy Masters in Chancery mumble out at the table of the House of Commons that the Lords had passed the Corn and Customs Bills, I was satisfied." Replying to a congratulatory address from the Manchester Chamber of Commerce, Peel urged an early reconciliation of manufacturing and agricultural interests, remarking that full justice had hardly yet been done to the moderation and forbearance of the class concerned in the cultivation of the soil. He assured the Chamber that in a private station he would give his continued support to those principles of commercial legislation which had been approved equally by the deductions of reason and by the results of practical experiment. "I shall rejoice," he added, "in the progress of all measures, adopted with due caution and circumspection, that shall be calculated by extending commerce to give additional security for general peace, and by insuring their just reward to skill and industry, to lay the best foundation for the intellectual and moral improvement of the people." These promises were practically fulfilled during the first session he was in opposition by the support he gave to the Government in their proposals for the relief of the terrible suffering and distress in Ireland, and other measures. He also supported the temporary suspension and final abrogation of the Navigation Laws. The abolition of these laws followed of course almost as a natural consequence upon the repeal of the Corn Laws.

Parliament was dissolved on the 23rd of July, 1847, and Sir Robert Peel issued an important manifesto to the electors of Tamworth. The Protectionist electors of the borough had clamoured for his resignation, and the address he now issued had both a local and personal and a national significance. Peel vindicated the motives which had dictated his whole policy, and the measures to which he had been a party. The endowment of Maynooth he treated as an isolated act in no way preparatory to a general endowment of the priesthood, though with regard to this point he declined to fetter his discretion as a legislator by any pledge to refuse the consideration of such a scheme "at all times and in all circumstances." He thus remarked upon his commercial policy: "It is my firm persuasion that the course sanctioned by the present Parliament with reference to our financial and commercial policy has tended to fortify the established institutions of this country, to inspire confidence in the equity and benevolence of the Legislature, to maintain the just authority of an hereditary nobility, and to discourage the desire for democratic change in the constitution of the House of Commons." The right hon. baronet concluded by expressing a wish that the electors would choose a representative entirely on public grounds, and not permit considerations of mere personal regard, or of his long connection with them, to influence their judgment. Peel and his brother were eventually elected without opposition.

On several subsequent occasions, alike in the country and in the House of Commons, Sir Robert Peel reiterated his conviction that the Legislature would never seek to re-impose the Corn Laws. In July, 1849, when Mr. Disraeli brought forward his motion for a committee to

take into consideration the state of the nation, the ex-Premier delivered an impassioned speech, in the course of which there occurred the following passage. Having denied that the repeal of the Corn Laws was a lucky accident, he said, "My belief is that it pleased Almighty God to listen to your prayers, to turn scarcity and dearth into cheapness and plenty, and so to direct and prosper your consultations on the brink of a great precipice and on the coming of a tremendous calamity, that you established peace and happiness in the foundations of truth and justice. You have reaped the reward of that policy, you have passed unscathed through the sternest trials to which the institutions of any nation were ever subjected. You stood erect amid the convulsions of Europe. And now you are to have a proposal made to you of some paltry fixed duty. Take then your 5s. duty and consider what it is. If it be 5s. on wheat, it will give you 2s. 6d. on barley, 2s. on oats—that is, 1s. 6d. more on barley and 1s. more on oats than you have at present—an equivocal advantage at the best. But by every consideration which can influence consistent and rational legislators, by the highest suggestions of a generous policy, by the boldest calculations of the lowest and most selfish prudence, I implore you to reject this proffered boon. I implore you not to sacrifice nor to barter the glorious heritage you have obtained by your sagacious and most timely policy, for the smallest and most worthless policy for which the greatest advantage was ever surrendered since the days of him who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage." Mr. Disraeli's motion was negatived by a majority of 296 to 156. On a further occasion in 1850, during another debate, on a motion by Mr. Disraeli, on the subject of the Poor Laws and the agricultural distress, Peel de-



fended himself for his course upon the Corn Laws—a course which, he said, he believed to have been his duty to his God and his country, and of the wisdom of which he was more convinced than ever. Protection never could be revived, he asserted ; and the landed aristocracy would one day see that the abrogation of Protection had established more firmly than ever their just influence. These predictions have been signally verified. Periodical debates on the subject of Protection have occurred since 1850, but every year that has passed has only rendered more remote the chances of a restoration of the system. The supporters of Protection have gradually declined in numbers until they are now almost extinct. In no instance has legislation been more completely justified by the course of events.

In less than eighteen months after accepting office the Whigs were driven to bring forward the same legislative measures which had proved fatal to their predecessors. On the 29th of November, 1847, Sir George Grey, the Home Secretary, introduced a Bill for the repression of crime and the protection of life in Ireland, the lines followed being almost identical with those of the Bill which wrecked the Peel Government. But Peel gave his hearty support to the measure, though he could not repress all mention of previous events. He would quarrel with none of the details of the measure, he said, and he could not resist the force of the appeal which had been made to the House, because it was precisely the same appeal which he had himself made, and made in vain. Then addressing himself to those Conservatives who had combined with the Whigs in June, 1846, he remarked that he hoped those who opposed the measure brought forward then would not think it incumbent upon

them, from any consideration for the late Government, to withhold their support from the Bill now before the House. The Bill was carried by the enormous majority of 224 votes against 18.

Peel spoke on several important measures brought forward by the Whig Government. When Lord John Russell introduced the question of popular education, Peel supported the propositions of the Cabinet, and, while expressing his firm attachment to the Anglican Church, exhibited scrupulous equity towards different creeds. He defended a religious as opposed to a secular education, and did not believe that the latter alone would be acceptable to the people of this country. Referring to the Roman Catholic population, and taking as an example a district in Manchester called the "Irish town," where the Irish inhabitants numbered from 60,000 to 70,000, he asked: "Is it for the advantage of the State that the children of these 60,000 or 70,000 people should be brought up in ignorance and vice? I confess I cannot conceive a more urgent case, not so far merely as the intellectual advantage of the Roman Catholics is concerned; but if there be any virtue in our principle—if the true remedy against barbarism and crime and degradation of character is instruction—it is not for the advantage of the Protestant community that these Roman Catholic children should remain immersed in ignorance." With regard to the admission of Jews into Parliament, Peel gave evidence of a like advanced liberality of sentiment. Baron Lionel de Rothschild having been elected one of the four representatives of the City of London, Lord John Russell proposed to relieve the Jews from the political disability which denied them admission into the House of Commons. Sir Robert Peel broke away from

many with whom he had hitherto acted, and unreservedly supported the proposition. While impressed by the conviction that the spirit and precepts of Christianity ought to influence their deliberations, yet, on the other hand, as a legislature they had no authority to determine religious error, and no commission to punish it. Even if they could determine who were the descendants of the persons guilty of the inexpressible crime of the Crucifixion, were they to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, not unto the third or fourth, but unto the three-hundredth or four-hundredth, generation? That awful power was not theirs. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, saith the Lord."

Ireland still continued to tax the energies of English statesmen in 1848 and 1849. Prosecutions were alternated now by coercive measures, and now by measures of relief. In the latter year, a select committee having been appointed upon the Irish Poor Law, a committee of the whole House was agreed to, after a long discussion, to consider the Government proposition of a rate in aid. The most remarkable feature of these Irish debates was a comprehensive speech by Sir Robert Peel. From his first entrance upon Parliamentary life Irish questions had demanded his attention. He now spoke with vigour and boldness, and developed at great length his views respecting the state of Ireland, suggesting also a plan for the redemption of landed property in that country. Some of his phrases struck like an electric shock upon the minds of his hearers. "If," he said, "technicalities and legal difficulties stood in their way, they should cut the Gordian knot and release the land." "Sooner than let the present state of things continue, he would altogether oust the Court of Chancery of its jurisdiction over

this subject." Alluding to the social condition of Ireland, he maintained that to mitigate her sufferings, and to lay the foundation for a better state of things, measures of no commonplace and ordinary character were requisite. With regard to emigration, he expressed his doubts as to the good results of a system of Government emigration, dwelling on the enormous expense it would involve, approving of what the Ministry were already doing to encourage voluntary emigration, and exhorting them to develop their measures in this direction rather than to adopt more direct and vaster schemes. But it was the state of landed property in Ireland which Peel regarded as of the greatest importance. Almost the only measure from which he derived a hope of safety was the introduction of new proprietors, who should take possession of land in Ireland freed from its existing encumbrances, and who should enter upon its cultivation with adequate capital, with new feelings, and inspired by new hopes. If a new settlement similar to that of Ulster could be effected, no religious distinction should be allowed to enter into the arrangement. Perhaps it might be prudent to appoint a commission for the purpose of considering the whole subject, and the possibility of encouraging that change in property which he believed to be indispensable. Peel, in answer to objections, pointed out the connection of his proposition with an Act which Parliament had passed in 1848 for the purpose of facilitating the sale of encumbered estates.

The proposed new scheme was strongly opposed by the old Irish party, who regarded it as a method of expulsion; but Peel's speech and his propositions had already exercised a powerful effect. There was consequently soon introduced a Bill for facilitating the sale and

transfer of encumbered estates. By this Act, a simple, short, and inexpensive mode of selling and transferring land was substituted for the tardy and ruinous course of procedure which had hitherto prevailed. The legislation thus initiated was wide, original, and of almost incalculable importance in ameliorating the social condition of Ireland. That unhappy country had owed the emancipation of the Catholics to Peel; and now "the most effectual measure ever adopted for the social regeneration of Ireland was the last great act of Peel's influence on the internal government of his country." So wrote M. Guizot in 1857, and his words up to that period represented the general feeling on the subject of Irish remedial legislation. A later Liberal Administration, however, introduced measures equally great, and as far-reaching in their effects.

On the 27th of June, 1849, Sir Robert Peel was entertained at a grand dinner at the Mansion House. The Lord Mayor, Sir James Duke, in proposing his health, glanced at the great political measures with which his name would be connected—the Currency, the reform of the Criminal Law, Catholic Emancipation, the revision of the Tariff, the abolition of the Corn Laws, and the permanent improvement of the condition of Ireland. In the autumn the eminent statesman visited Scotland, receiving the freedom of the City of Aberdeen. Towards the close of the year Peel had the honour of receiving a visit at Drayton Manor from King Louis Philippe, whom he congratulated on having preserved the peace of the world. The King, speaking under the influence of deep emotion, replied that the task for which he had been praised was easy, when at the head of affairs in this country were such men as Sir Robert Peel and Lord Aberdeen.



The session of 1850 opened with bright and cheerful prospects. Sir Robert Peel was heard in several debates, but in none with the eloquence which marked his speech during the discussion on the foreign policy of Lord Palmerston. This was fated to be his last speech in that House where he had long been one of its most distinguished ornaments. On the 17th of June, on a motion by Lord Stanley, the Government were censured for undue interference in the affairs of Greece. Two British subjects, Mr. Finlay, a Scotchman, and Don Pacifico, a Gibraltar Jew, asserted that they had been injured by the Greek Government, and demanded large indemnities in consequence. Serious differences arose on this subject between the Cabinets of London and Paris, and the French Ministers at Athens and London quitted their posts. Lord Stanley's motion was carried in a not very large House by a majority of 37.

This defeat led to a debate on the general foreign policy of the Government, opened by Mr. Roebuck, who moved "That the principles on which the foreign policy of her Majesty's Government has been regulated have been such as were calculated to maintain the honour and dignity of this country, and, in times of unexampled difficulty, to preserve peace between England and the various nations of the world." The debate which ensued was very protracted. Sir Robert Peel rose on the last night, the 28th, and although he could not endorse the motion, the generosity with which he spoke of Lord Palmerston greatly moved the House. "We are all proud of him," he said. Peel reminded the House that since the accession of the Whig Cabinet he had constantly supported it in its home administration, and frequently also in its embarrassments with foreign powers. He had now come

forward with no condemnation, nor was he a party to any combination ; but when he was required to acquiesce in a declaration of positive approbation of the foreign policy of the Government as distinguished from the policy of its predecessors that was a different matter. The resolution was too comprehensive. " It is my firm belief," he said, " that you will not advance the cause of constitutional government by attempting to dictate to other nations. If you do, your intentions will be mistaken, you will rouse feelings upon which you do not calculate, you will invite opposition to Government ; and beware that the time does not arrive when, frightened by your own interference, you withdraw your countenance from those whom you have excited, and leave upon their minds the bitter recollection that you have betrayed them. If you succeed, I doubt whether or no the institutions that take root under your patronage will be lasting. Constitutional liberty will be best worked out by those who aspire to freedom by their efforts. You will only overload it by your help." Mr. Roebuck's motion was carried by 310 votes against 264, being a majority of 46 for the Government.

On the following day Sir Robert Peel left his house for his usual ride. Calling first at Buckingham Palace to inscribe his name on the Queen's visitors' list, he proceeded up Constitution Hill, where he met one of Lady Dover's daughters, also on horseback. Advancing to meet her, his horse shied at some object, and threw him over its head. He fell with his face to the ground. Dr. Foucart, of Glasgow, who was near the spot, came up, and asked Sir Robert whether he was much hurt. " Yes, very much," he replied, and with a deep groan he fainted before a carriage could be procured. After being

placed in the carriage of Mrs. Lucas he recovered his senses, and said, "I feel better." Sir James Clark now appeared and tendered his services, having heard of the accident. The suffering statesman was conveyed home with difficulty; but on reaching his own door he resumed full consciousness, and walked into the house without assistance. The meeting with Lady Peel and his family greatly affected Sir Robert, and he again fainted. He was carried into the nearest room, the dining-room, and laid upon a sofa; from this he was never moved. Sir Benjamin Brodie and other physicians and surgeons were summoned, but they were unable to ascertain the actual effects of the accident and the full extent of the injury. The alarm and nervous irritability of the patient were very great, and it was not until after his death that it was discovered that, in addition to a fracture of the collar-bone, the fifth rib on the left side was fractured. It was the rib pressing upon the lung, and producing a congestion of that organ, which was the immediate cause of death.

As soon as the accident became known, multitudes of inquirers, from the royal princes downwards, called at Whitehall Gardens to ascertain the condition of the sufferer. His condition became rapidly worse; yet in his delirium his thoughts were with his friends, and the names of Lord Hardinge and Sir James Graham were frequently upon his lips. On the afternoon of the 2nd of July it became apparent that the end was at hand. The Bishop of Gibraltar, an old friend of Sir Robert's, was sent for; and on his arrival Lady Peel and her children returned into the sick-room, surrounding the bed in silence and in prayer. The distinguished patient, reviving for a moment, recognised them, and endeavoured to give them his hands,

uttering the scarcely articulate words, "God bless you!" Lady Peel's emotion was so great that she had to be led away. Shortly after eleven o'clock at night Sir Robert expired, without agony, surrounded by three of his brothers, three of his sons, his son-in-law, Lord Villiers, and his cherished friends, Lord Hardinge and Sir James Graham.

In the House of Commons, on the following day, in the absence of Ministers, Mr. Hume, Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Napier, and Sir R. H. Inglis paid their tribute of homage to the deceased with expressions of sincere regret, and moved the adjournment of the House. "I am quite sure," said Mr. Gladstone, "that every heart is too full to allow us, at a period so early, to enter upon the consideration of the amount of that calamity with which the country has been visited in his, I must even now say, premature death; for though he has died full of years and full of honours, yet it is a death which our human eyes will regard as premature, because we had fondly hoped that in whatever situation he was placed, by the weight of his character, by the splendour of his talents, by the purity of his virtues, he would still have been spared to render to his country the most essential services. I will only, sir, quote those most touching and feeling lines which were applied by one of the greatest poets of this country to the memory of a man great indeed, but yet not greater than Sir Robert Peel:—

'Now is the stately column broke,  
The beacon light is quenched in smoke;  
The trumpet's silver voice is still;  
The warder silent on the hill.' "

M. Dupin, the President of the French Assembly, also passed an eloquent eulogium upon the deceased states-

man. On the 4th of July Lord John Russell, with the sanction of the Queen, proposed to inter the remains of Sir Robert Peel with public honours. In announcing this to the House of Commons, his lordship justly described Peel's great services to his country. "Having had no political connection with him myself," said Lord John Russell, "perhaps this proposal may come more fitly from me, as not being moved by any partiality. But I do feel that this country now, and that posterity hereafter, in reckoning the names of eminent statesmen who have adorned the annals of this country, and have contributed to their lustre, will place that of Sir Robert Peel among the foremost.'"

Mr. Goulburn, who had been Peel's Chancellor of the Exchequer, and was one of the executors of his will, declined on behalf of his family the proposal for a public funeral. In doing so he quoted the following passage from Sir Robert Peel's will, made on the 8th of May, 1844, when the right hon. gentleman was at the head of a large party in the House, and when his measures had been crowned with a success even transcending his own expectations: "I desire that I may be interred in the vault in the parish church of Drayton, in which my father and mother were interred, and that my funeral may be without ostentation or parade of any kind." These sentiments the deceased never changed, but reiterated them to Lady Peel only six weeks before his death. In the House of Lords, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Lord Stanley, Lord Brougham, and the Duke of Wellington—two of whom had widely differed from the deceased on great political questions—did honour to his memory by their expressions of deep regret over his sudden and lamented death.



Peel was buried at Drayton on the 9th of July, the parish church being crowded by the people amongst whom he had lived, and by whom he was revered and beloved. In the House of Commons, on the 12th of July, Lord John Russell proposed that a monument should be erected to the deceased in Westminster Abbey. "Let us do it now," said the Whig leader, "not two centuries hence, as in the case of the honours to Hampden and Lord Falkland—not even ten, twenty, or thirty years from hence, but now, when every one agrees in the desire to do honour to the memory of Sir Robert Peel." The House at once assented to the proposition, and the Queen gave the necessary authority for carrying it into effect.

But of all the memorials, perhaps the one to be most remembered is that raised in the name of the working classes, and for which a penny subscription was set on foot. Mr. Cobden readily associated his name with this "Poor Man's National Monument." He wrote in doing so, "The illustrious statesman who has been taken away from us with such awful suddenness, sacrificed every other object of ambition to secure to the firesides and workshops of the toiling multitudes of this country the blessings of increased prosperity, health, and happiness." Mr. Cobden then reminded the working men that in the moment of his severest trial, when he lost his friends, and the floodgates of calumny were let loose upon him, Peel turned for sympathy and justice to the mass of the people. The writer also quoted the words from his last speech as a Minister, which we have already given in the course of this biography, and added, "Thus, in the work you have undertaken, you are, perhaps unconsciously, realising the aspirations of the departed statesman. In piling up the pence of the working class

into a pyramid to his memory, let me suggest that the above passage be inscribed upon its base. It will prove that he did not over-estimate the justice or gratitude of his countrymen." Monuments, statues, and other memorials to Peel's memory have since been raised in London, Manchester, Glasgow, and other great cities and towns of the empire.

It only remains to be added here that Sir Robert Peel declined a peerage, the Order of the Garter, and other honours and distinctions which her Majesty and her royal predecessor were desirous of conferring upon him for his eminent public services.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CHARACTER OF 'PEEL.

**I**F the actions of one generation must be submitted to the judgment of another, there are still fitting tributes to the worth of a statesman, or any other eminent public man, which may be paid by his contemporaries. Amongst such tributes is to be reckoned the universal and unsolicited sympathy which was evoked by the untoward death of Sir Robert Peel. This sympathy not only sprang unbidden from the lips of his friends and associates, but came in an equally emphatic and spontaneous degree from his political opponents. It was a moment when all political feelings were absorbed in the feeling of regret that so distinguished a career should be brought to a premature close. Those who most widely differed from him admitted that in all the great acts of his political life he had been actuated by a sincere and conscientious desire to compass that which should be for the public good. Lord Brougham, who for forty years had been opposed to Sir Robert Peel on most political questions, acknowledged fully and cheerfully his splendid merits, and expressed his conviction that upon the subjects on which they had differed from each other he acted from the most pure and conscientious motives. "At the last stage of his public career," said his lord-

ship, "chequered as it was, and I told him in private that chequered it would be, when he was differing from those with whom he had been so long connected, and from purely public-spirited feelings was adopting a course which was so galling and unpleasing to them—I told him that he must turn from the storm without to the sunshine of an approving conscience within." Whether right or wrong, Peel had made sacrifices, said Brougham, compared with which all the sacrifices exacted from public men by a sense of public duty which he had ever known or read of sunk into nothing. Lord Stanley said he should be joined by universal Europe in the regret he expressed for the sudden bereavement which had befallen Peel's family, for the great loss sustained by his country, and for the sudden removal from the world of one who in private life was universally admitted to be in the possession of every virtue, and to be strictly unimpeachable. Whatever might be the difference of political views, no one would deny to the deceased the praise of having been an able, an assiduous, and a conscientious servant of his country. Nor must the brief tribute of the Duke of Wellington be forgotten. The Iron Duke stated that in the whole course of his communications with Peel he never knew an instance in which he did not show the strongest attachment to truth, referring not to the truth of language merely, but to that fuller and higher truth of motive and of unswervingly upright conduct.

As a writer of the time observed, Peel died in harness. He never sought repose, and his almost morbid restlessness rendered him incapable of enjoying it. His life was one of constant effort; and, adopting the maxim that anything which is worth doing is worth doing well, he

gave to everything in which he engaged labour the most strenuous and conscientious. His official powers were justly described as Atlantean, for they have rarely been paralleled, and his ministerial expositions were on the same gigantic scale. A writer in the *Times* observed, however, that "there was an almost equal appearance of effort in his most casual remarks, at least when in public, for he would never throw away a chance; and he still trusted to his industry rather than to his powers. But a man whose life is passed in the service of the public, and whose habits are parliamentary or official, is not to be judged by ordinary rules, for he can scarcely fail to be cold, guarded, and ostentatious. His egotism was proverbial; but, besides the excessive use of the first person, it occasionally betrayed him into performances at variance both with prudence and taste." In illustration of his egotism, it is a fact that in the speeches of no statesman of equal eminence are to be found so many defences of or apologies for his public measures, and this is not altogether accounted for on the ground that perhaps his policy was more frequently attacked than that of any other political leader.

- As a public speaker, Peel was one of the most effective orators in the House of Commons; and yet in the higher aspects of oratory his speeches fell far below those of Burke, Fox, and Canning. He was fluent, but they were eloquent. He had talents of silver, but they had talents of gold. In a word, Peel was the product of effort, while the great orators we have named were men of genius. Without being able to define this genius in all its fulness, we can feel wherein it differs from the mere talent of less gifted men. Peel's oratory was of no burning and electric character; it was methodical,



persuasive, convincing. He had a powerful voice and an emphatic delivery, and his language was sometimes superior to his matter. He invariably presented the topics he treated with clearness and skill. As Milton said, "His words, like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command, and, in well-ordered files, as he could wish, fall aptly into their places." Peel thoroughly enjoyed the feelings which accompany the delivery of a speech of great length, and one that was looked forward to by the House, and he exhibited singular dexterity in replying to opponents who laid themselves open to his retorts. "Let some blundering speaker," said a contemporary critic, "make some awkward admission or obvious exaggeration—let some philosopher wander out of the ordinary track, and draw arguments for annual Parliaments from the annual revolution of the earth—then Sir Robert Peel treasures them all up, gives them a ludicrous turn, and with his face all wreathed with smiles turns round to enjoy the bursting laughter and the ringing cheer which echo leaves behind him." His practice as a debater led to his acquiring the reputation of being the greatest master of plausibilities in the House of Commons. As a speaker Peel occasionally touched the heights of genuine eloquence, but chiefly in those passages of his oratory which had a personal bearing; more frequently he was imposing and successful in argument, and on almost all occasions he was telling and effective.

In private life he was especially beloved and esteemed. His reading was most extensive, his classical scholarship being wide and accurate, and it is well known that he expended his private fortune in the patronage of literature and the arts. At Drayton Manor he possessed

a fine library and a magnificent collection of pictures and drawings. He was always ready to extend his official patronage to men of talent and genius, and typical instances of this arise to the memory as we think of Thomas Hood and Haydon the painter. When the latter was in the throes of despair, it was the hand of Peel that privately ministered to his needs. He stands conspicuous amongst Ministers for the number of men eminent in every branch of art and science whose merits were, upon his recommendation, publicly acknowledged. Although he threw himself with such ardour into public life, he yet keenly enjoyed the pleasures of the country, and no portion of his life was happier than that which he spent at Drayton, managing his estates with industry, caution, and vigour, and entering into the pursuits and interests of those by whom he was surrounded.

The character of this man, whose brilliant Administration effected so much permanent good for the country, while personally its leader was subjected to obloquy and misrepresentation, is more complex than it seems. M. Capefigue, writing from the standpoint of a high Tory and a high Churchman—being a Royalist in politics and an Ultramontane in religion—severely censured Sir Robert Peel for the rapidity of his political changes. He complained that he had destroyed his party, and that everything he touched he impressed with a meanness of resources natural to a man specially occupied with figures and calculations. The Tory party was lost, says M. Capefigue, on the day it put itself into the hands of Peel, because he had neither the instinct of its glory, its education, nor the prescience of its great destinies. We have given the opinion of this hostile foreign critic

because it is typical of that restricted band of English politicians who never forgave Sir Robert Peel his reversal of the traditional policy of the Conservative party. We now pass on to other opinions. "In the early part of his life," says Lord Dalling and Bulwer, "I have no doubt that ambition, and the personal motives of ambition, had a certain influence over his actions. At a later period, in his last Administration, and after quitting office, I believe he had no personal view that separated him in the slightest degree from an entire and disinterested devotion to the interests of his country. He was a scholar in the highest sense of the term; nor did the attention he could give to the driest details of business damp his sympathy for the elegancies of literature, or his appreciation of what was beautiful, whether in painting or sculpture. He had no hatred, no inveterate prejudices, against persons or things. His domestic virtues are too well known to make it necessary to allude to them. In short, without pretending to raise him above the defects and littlenesses of human nature, I do not know where to point to any one who united such talents for public business with such qualities in private life." The same writer, however, in instituting a comparison between Canning and Peel, admits that the great acts of the latter were the development of Mr. Canning's principles—the hatching of the earlier statesman's ideas. "Each left a school. In the one we may learn how to sustain our renown and our power abroad; in the other how to advance our prosperity at home. Both were the citizens of a free State; but if I might venture to distinguish the peculiarities of these two illustrious Englishmen by a reference to classical examples, I would say that the one resembled a Greek in

the most glorious times of Athens, the other reminded you of a Roman in the noblest epoch of the city of Romulus."

Lord Beaconsfield, in his "Life of Lord George Bentinck," has left a sketch of the character of Peel which has been frequently commented upon. He complains that while gifted and accomplished, Peel had one great deficiency—he lacked imagination, and wanting imagination he wanted prescience. After a protracted display of admirable tactics, he always concluded his campaigns by surrendering at discretion. There was always some person representing a theory or system exercising an influence over his mind. His life was one of perpetual education. No one ever strained the constitution so much; and he was the unconscious parent of political agitation. As regards his oratory, his style may be called the didactic. These are some of the points of the criticism which Lord Beaconsfield thus concludes: "One cannot say of Sir Robert Peel, notwithstanding his unrivalled power of despatching affairs, that he was the greatest Minister that this country ever produced, because, twice placed at the helm, and on the second occasion with the Court and the Parliament equally devoted to him, he never could maintain himself in power. Nor, notwithstanding his consummate parliamentary tactics, can he be described as the greatest party leader that ever flourished amongst us, for he contrived to destroy the most compact, powerful, and devoted party that ever followed a British statesman. Certainly, notwithstanding his great sway in debate, we cannot recognise him as our greatest orator, for in many of the supreme requisites of oratory he was singularly deficient. But what he really was, and what posterity will acknowledge him to have been, is the greatest



member of Parliament that ever lived." In an acute and discriminating analysis of Peel's character by Mr. Bagehot, that writer expresses in different form a similar idea to one cited from Lord Beaconsfield, when he says that Peel did not so much act himself as he was acted upon. But Mr. Bagehot adds that Peel purified the Tory party, and that so long as constitutional statesmanship is what it is now (he was writing a quarter of a century ago), "so long as its function is the recording the views of a confused nation, so long as success in it is confined to minds plastic, changeful, administrative, we must hope for no better. You have excluded the profound thinker; you must be content with what you can obtain—the business gentleman." Mr. Roebuck remarked that had the intellect of Sir Robert Peel been of a bolder and more original cast he would probably have been a less successful Minister, as in that case he might often have proposed reforms before the nation was prepared to receive them, and thus have diminished his power as a Minister while earning the renown of a philosopher. The statesman, to be useful, must be powerful; and in a Government like ours, and among a practical people like the English, the safest course for a reforming Minister is never to be before his age." The same critic well observes that Peel's sympathies were not sectional but national.

We cannot exhaust the judgments which have been given of the character of Peel, but two more we will add to those already quoted—one from a French statesman who was thrown into personal contact with him, the other from an English relative. "He was a great and honest servant of the State," says M. Guizot, having previously paid a tribute to his disinterestedness, "proud with a sort



of humility, and desiring to shine with no brilliancy extrinsic to his natural sphere ; devoted to his country without any craving for reward ; heedless of fixed principles or long-standing political combinations ; anxious at all times to ascertain what was demanded by the public interest, and ready to carry it into effect without caring either for parties and their rules of conduct or for his own acts and words ; severing himself from the past without cynical indifference, braving the future without adventurous boldness, solely swayed by the desire to meet the necessities of the present, and to do himself honour by delivering his country from peril or embarrassment." He was always patriotic and sincere, "and marvellously adapted, in a period of transition like ours, to conduct the Government of modern society as it has become, and as it is becoming more and more, in England and elsewhere, under the influence of the democratic principles and feelings which have been fermenting in Europe for fifteen centuries, and which in our days are gaining victories in regard to which no one can yet tell what will be their true and final result."

Answering the oft-repeated charge that the character of Peel is an enigma, Sir Lawrence Peel observes that "his mind might have been in some instances more constant, but that constancy would have been gained at the cost of its truthfulness. The struggles of his political life resemble those of the religious life of many an earnest man. Examine the life of a Luther ; see the reluctance to move, the tardy steps, the faltering, the halting steps, a backward step or two, the doubts whether the speaking spirit be of heaven or of hell, the final, full, and glorious close ; let a man then look inward ; let him insert in his own mind

the 'tent that reaches to the bottom of the worst;' let him ask himself in earnest if he has not felt these agonies at various stages of his life and of his opinions; and I think he will find within himself a solution of the question why this great man's character has appeared an enigma." It was impossible for such a man either to suppress his convictions or to refrain from acting upon them.

Words once used to describe Walpole are eminently applicable to the statesman whose career we have traced. By his intelligence and prudence, and without the assistance of the more divine influence of genius, he was able to perceive and provide for the interests of a commercial nation; and he saw that he could assist the prosperity of his country effectually by clearing away, as much as possible, the duties and impositions by which he found British commerce encumbered and impoverished. "He found our Book of Rates (or the Tariff) the worst and left it the best in Europe—a most important eulogism. We have here merit, and of a most solid nature; a man in a high station going through minute details and tediously disgusting examinations, and exerting his patience, his industry, and his talents in a sort of silent and obscure drudgery, where, though they were exerted highly to the benefit of the community, they could not be exerted with that *éclat* to which they most assuredly were entitled." While not exhaustive, these sentences sufficiently indicate the nature of Peel's commercial policy. But there was more in this eminent man than the mere reformer of the commercial tariff. It is, perhaps, his most conspicuous merit that he knew the seasons when to take public opinion at the flood, and thus to avert revolution by timely concessions. There were periods

of national crisis when he only had the power to carry organic changes loudly demanded by the people; and it is his abiding distinction that he answered the call as a patriot and a statesman, while he suffered his fame as a great party leader to be temporarily overshadowed.

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